

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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DEATH IS WHERE YOU FIND IT

MIKE SHAYNE

A Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE SAVONAROLA SYNDROME

A Thrilling Novelet

by JAMES HOLDING

A SHOT UNHEARD

by GERALD FRANKLYN



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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1976
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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

DEATH IS WHERE YOU FIND IT

by BRETT HALLIDAY

To the Miami-detective, Berlinda Isley was a brief romantic memory who suddenly returned to his life. To the man who was seeking a Presidential nomination, Berlinda constituted a threat to his political career. To the fugitive underworld leader, this lovely blonde from Chicago represented a long jail sentence. So when Berlinda's body turned up on a Miami Beach dump, Shayne found himself caught in a mixmaster of murder as chief suspect—for the good and simple reason that she was slain with his own handgun 2 to 55

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DEATH IS WHERE YOU FIND IT

Alive, Berlinda was a hot blonde—dead, she was even hotter. For this unassuming Miami housewife turned out to be a time-bomb for a number of individuals with clout—including Shayne as chief suspect.

by BRETT HALLIDAY



THE PHONE CALL was unexpected, awakening Mike Shayne from deep slumber. He groped for the bedside table lamp, turned it on, cocked an eye at the electric alarm clock. It was five-thirty in the morning—surely no time to be waked up, especially after a night on the town with a gorgeous blonde he had not seen in five years.

The big redhead picked up

the extension phone, growled, "Yeah? Mike Shayne..."

He thought it might be Lucy with some sort of urgent message—it had happened before. But the voice on the other end of the line was crisp, acerbic and held a hidden malice. He recognized it immediately as that of Peter Painter, Miami Beach's Chief of Detectives.

"Shayne, you've got fifteen minutes to get down to the city

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dump! One minute late and I put an APB out on you!"

There was a click on the other end of the line before the redhead had time to answer.

Mike Shayne sat on the edge of his bed and ran stiff fingers

through his tousled hair. Five-thirty in the morning! Damn it, he could tell Petey Painter where to go! Only he didn't know where Painter had called from—and Petey had sounded grimmer than usual.

Mike crawled out of bed, shucked his pajamas and cocked an eye at himself in the bathroom mirror as he washed. He didn't have time to shave. He pulled on his clothes, grabbed his hat off the hatrack as he went out, scowling.

He took the hotel elevator down to the garage level, crossed to where his big Buick was parked. There was a flyer tucked in under his windshield, reminding him to vote for Gareth (Gar) Anderson in the upcoming presidential primary. The big redhead tore it off, balled it in a fist, moved to toss it away. There were a half dozen candidates campaigning this year and the state was aswarm with Secret Service men.

Shayne caught a flicker of movement at the far end of the garage and reacted with the agility of a cat. He spun away and down just as the shot blasted, the explosion magnified within the confined garage space.

The second shot came a split second later, ricochetting off the iron support pole just to the right of Shayne's Buick as the private detective rolled between his car and the one parked next to it. The would-be killer was a bad shot, or his nerves were jumpy. Shayne crawled to his car door, reached up, opened it. He slid inside and reached for

the gun locked in the glove compartment.

The redhead got a nasty surprise. The glove compartment had been jimmied open and his gun was gone!

Mike Shayne sat up and stared grimly through the windshield as rapid footfalls echoed from the far end of the garage. They faded toward the street and a moment later a car motor roared into life.

Shayne started the Buick, backed quietly out of his parking slot. He spun the wheel, his rear tires burning rubber as he gunned the Buick out to the street.

It was early morning. Across Biscayne Bay the wall of high rise hotels of Miami Beach was turning pink as daylight fingered the eastern sky.

The street was empty. Whoever the attempted killer was, he had made good his escape.

Shayne wasted little time on idle regret. He had a hunch that what had just happened here this morning might be tied in with Painter's urgent phone call. Settling behind the wheel, the redhead, fully awake now and grimly angry, headed for the city dump. He made it in just under the allotted fifteen minutes.

MIAMI BEACH Chief of Detectives Peter Painter's car was

parked just inside the city dump. Shayne spotted it as he turned into what passed for a road between refuse heaps still to be bulldozed into the landfill further on. An ambulance was pulled up alongside. A Miami Beach police car was parked further on. A couple of uniformed men were searching the refuse heaps. Seagulls were circling in the dawn sky above them, squawling their displeasure at being disturbed in their ceaseless search for something to eat.

Shayne parked beside the city ambulance. As he got out he was flanked by Detectives Bolton and Deblin. Bolton said, "I see you got your butt out here on time, Shayne. I was just getting ready to come for you."

Shayne ignored him as he strode among the refuse heaps toward Painter, who was talking to one of the ambulance attendants. They were standing a few feet away from a body covered by a rubberized tarpulin.

Painter turned as Shayne came up. "Glad you got here, Shayne," he said. His voice was cool, his smile thin, guarded.

"It better be good, Petey," the redhead growled. He didn't like being routed out of bed at five-thirty in the morning.

"It is," Painter said curtly. He motioned toward the cov-

ered body. "Take a good look, Shayne."

The redhead eyed the small man. Even at this ungodly hour, Peter Painter managed to look like a man just about to go out on a dinner date. He was freshly shaven, his Italian silk suit immaculate, his handkerchief peeking out of his breast pocket, his steel-plated, high-rise shoes polished.

Shayne scowled. "Who is it?"

"You tell me." Painter's tone held that note of hidden malice.

Shayne knelt beside the body, lifted a corner of the rubberized covering. He stiffened slightly, stared at the body for a long time.

Some women pass through a man's life without leaving a trace. Others he does not forget.

Like a girl named Berlinda Isley.

She lay under the covering, her blonde hair matted, the green sheath dress blood spattered. Almond-shaped green eyes stared sightlessly up at him—eyes that in life had been laughing, teasing, stormy. Her body had more than once graced the centerfold of *Playboy Magazine*.

"You know her, don't you?"

Mike Shayne nodded, anger choking him. He straightened, looked at Painter, said, "Where'd you find her?"

"Right here, among the rub-

bish," Painter replied. "Night sergeant got call from a bum combing the dump. He didn't give his name, didn't want to get involved."

Shayne stared down at the body. "Name's Berlinda Isley. Model—sometimes actress. I met her in Chicago, five years ago..."

Painter fingered his small black mustache. "Old girlfriend, eh?"

Shayne shrugged. "Not exactly. We had some good times together."

"Good enough for her to look you up in Miami?" Painter suggested. "Ask for help?"

Shayne said impatiently, "What in hell are you talking about, Petey?"

The chief of detectives took a card out of his pocket, held it out to Shayne.

"Found this in her bag."

Shayne glanced at the card. It was a plain white card with his name and business information printed on it. He didn't have many of these in circulation. He was widely known in Miami and had little use for them.

"Turn it over," Painter said.

There was a message scrawled across the back of the card. It said simply, *Call Mike Shayne. He'll help.*

"You were with her last night?" Painter made it a ques-

tion, but it was obvious he already knew the answer.

Shayne nodded. "Berlinda came into the Seminole Room while I was having a drink with Tim Rourke. I didn't know she was in town. We renewed an old friendship, then went out and painted the town."

"When did you see her last?"

"About one-thirty this morning. She told me she was staying at the Fontainebleau. I dropped her off in front of the hotel and went home."

"You can prove that, Shayne?"

Shayne eyed the small man with annoyance. "Prove what?"

"What time you got home?"

The redhead had been grilled before; he didn't like it. He and Painter were not on the best of terms and he knew the chief of detectives would love to have something on him.

He said flatly, "Petey, you're barking up the wrong tree."

"Am I now?" There was smugness in Painter's tone. He motioned to Detective Bolton, who went to Painter's car, came back holding a snub-nosed .45 Colt in the palm of his big hand.

"I put in a call to the Miami police, got a confirmation on the serial number." He paused, black eyes glittering. "It's your gun, isn't it, Shayne?"

The redhead stiffened. He

knew now why Painter had sounded so sure of himself. He had Shayne backed into a corner, and Petey knew it.

"Could be," Mike Shayne replied grimly. "Somone stole mine last night. I kept it in the glove compartment. I found it jimmied open this morning."

"Yeah—sure," Detective Bolton sneered. "Fast thinking, Shayne. But it won't get you anywhere—"

Painter cut him off. "Check it out!"

Deblin went with Bolton to Shayne's Buick. Painter nodded to the morgue attendants and they took Berlinda's body into the ambulance and drove off to the city morgue.

Painter rocked on the balls of his small feet. "Three bullets in her, Shayne." His voice was soft, dispassionate. "I'm having ballistics check them out. If they came from your gun—"

"It'll only prove someone stole my gun and killed her with it!" Shayne cut in. Then, bluntly, "Petey, I've been levelling with you. I told you all I know. I hadn't seen Berlinda in five years. If she was in trouble, she didn't tell me. We had a good time together, then I dropped her off at her hotel."

Shayne turned as Bolton came back with Deblin. The beefy detective's voice was sullen. "It's been jimmied," he



said. He looked at Shayne, thick lips curling. "But he could have done it himself, to cover up."

Painter looked disappointed.

"We were friends," Shayne said, speaking to Painter. "Why should I kill her?" He shook his head as Painter didn't answer. "Sure, that's my gun. But you'll need more than that to convince the D.A.'s office. You'll need a motive. And you don't have one, Petey—not for me!"

Mike Shayne spun around on his heel. Bolton tried to head him off, but the powerful redhead shoved him out of his way.

"Shayne!"

Shayne turned. Painter was pointing a finger at him, his voice strained.

"Maybe I don't have a motive—yet! But when I do, Shayne—"

"You know where to find me!" Shayne snapped.

II

SHAYNE DROVE BACK across Biscayne Bay with the sun at his back just beginning to slant against the beachfront hotels on Collins Avenue. He was in a grim unsettled mood. He was trying to reconstruct his evening with Berlinda, beginning with their meeting last night.

Shayne had been seated at a table in the Seminole Room with Tim Rourke, a place neither of them frequented, but which this night suited them. The tuxedoed black piano player was playing jazz, evoking old memories.

They were discussing political campaigns and remarking on the plethora of presidential candidates this year. Tim, as usual, was cynical. The cadaverous reporter saw too much of the seamy side of living and of corruption in high places for naive optimism.

He had just finished a series of articles on the new breed of residents moving into exclusive beachfront homes along the old

Gold Coast—most of them secluding themselves behind high iron gates and security guards.

One of them was "Colly" Galiano, a man with shady connections running back to Syndicate operations in New York and Chicago. He was in his fifties, a prematurely gray, sun-tanned man who limped from what he claimed to be an old Korean war wound aggravated by a car accident.

He had moved into the old Hayes place six months before and was seldom seen in any of the night spots of Miami Beach or Miami itself. He had a sixty-foot yacht riding at anchor in the marina.

Shayne had been working on a bottle of Martell when he looked up and there was Berlinda coming toward him, in a long body-clinging green gown that matched her eyes.

She had feigned surprise at finding him there. Tim, sensing an old friendship, had excused himself.

Shayne remembered the writing on the back of his card. If Berlinda was in trouble, she had not shown it to him. She had seemed genuinely glad to see Shayne—had told him she was in Miami on a job and leaving on the morrow. They had made a night of it, then he dropped her off, as he had told Painter, at the Fontainebleau.

It was obvious now that she *had* been in trouble. Someone had used Shayne's gun to kill her. It must have occurred shortly after he left her, for she was still wearing the same green gown.

She had sought him out—Shayne was sure of that now. But something had kept her from telling him why, from asking his help.

He turned onto Biscayne Boulevard and headed for his apartment on the north bank of the Miami River. Painter had his gun and was after his blood. Shayne needed a shower and time to think. There were a lot of unanswered questions boiling in his mind.

The hotel janitor was wheeling trash cans out to the sidewalk when Mike Shayne drove into the residential hotel garage. He parked the Buick in its slot, eyed the bullet-splotched iron post as he strode to the elevator and rode it up to his apartment.

He put his hand on the knob, then stiffened. The door was ajar. He remembered closing it. He wasn't sure whether he had locked it.

He hesitated only a moment, then shoved it open wide and slammed inside. If someone was waiting for him, Shayne was ready!

He banged his shins against

an overturned table, turned aside and stopped.

The living room was a shambles. So was the bedroom. Bedding lay strewn around, the mattress was overturned. Dresser drawers were pulled out, their contents dumped on the floor. Even the kitchen had not escaped.

Someone had made a thorough search of his place while he was out. Shayne's jaw knotted. What were they looking for?

The phone rang. It lay on the floor beside the overturned table. Shayne picked it up, said "Yeah?"

It was Rourke. Tim's voice sounded relieved. "Been calling you from the city morgue. About that girl you went out with last night—the blonde you called Berlinda?"

Shayne's voice was grim. "Who called you?"

Tim's voice held a grin. "A good reporter has friends." Then, serious, "Someone pumped three slugs into her, Shayne."

"I know," the redhead growled.

"Oh?" Tim sounded surprised. "You mixed up in it?"

"Up to my neck," Shayne said.

Tim's sharp whistle came over the wire. "Can you meet me at my desk at the Miami

News—right away? I think I've got something interesting to show you, Mike."

"Give me twenty minutes," Shayne replied. "Got a little housekeeping to do first. . ."

It took Shayne a bit longer to get things back in order. He gave up on the shower and shave. He was hungry, but he could always grab himself a bite later.

He was aroused now, angry—and when Mike Shayne was aroused, he was dangerous.

He was on his way out when a thought struck him. He swung around to the phone, thumbed through the thick directory, and put in a call to the Fontainebleau, one of Miami Beach's older but still swanky hotels.

The desk clerk's tone was professionally courteous.

Shayne asked him if a Berlinda Isley was registered. The desk clerk said no, that no one by that name was registered at the Fontainebleau. Shayne pressed him. The clerk said he'd check again. His tone was colder. When he came back on the line he repeated it—no one by that name was on the register.

Shayne hung up, tugged at his ear lobe. He knew Painter would be checking his story.

Berlinda had lied to him. She hadn't been staying at the Fon-

tainebleau. But Shayne *had* dropped her off there last night. He had seen her go into the lobby. He had had no reason to doubt her.

Slowly Shayne felt the web of circumstance closing in on him. Painter had been after his scalp for a long time and finding a hole in Shayne's story would take him a step closer.

Still, Shayne thought bleakly, Painter was a cautious man. He wouldn't put out a warrant for the redhead until he knew he could make it stand up.

Shayne figured that gave him some leeway—gave him time to find out what had brought Berlinda to Miami, why she had looked him up. And why someone had killed her, using *his* gun to do it!

Shayne locked the door behind him as he went out and took the elevator down to the garage. People were beginning to stir inside the hotel. Outside, Miami was coming to life as early workday traffic began to move in the streets.

Mike Shayne crossed to the Buick and slipped in behind the wheel. No one took a shot at him this time. Not that he expected it—he was pretty sure that whoever it was had circled back and searched his rooms while he was on his way to meet Painter.

What could the killer have been after?

Shayne thought about this as he nosed the Buick out into Second Avenue and headed up-town for the Miami *Daily News*.

III

MIKE SHAYNE STRODE into the busy Miami *Daily News* newsroom, waved a greeting to Carl Dirkson, the city editor, who sat hunched over copy for the afternoon edition, and headed toward a small cubbyhole in the far corner.

Tim Rourke was waiting for him. The tall, thin ace reporter had a bottle sitting on his desk and a crooked smile on his hollow-cheeked face. A cigarette dangled from his lips.

He butted it out as Shayne came in, jabbing it in an ashtray already well loaded.

"Looks like you had a bad night, Mike," he commented. He poured a slug of whiskey into a paper cup, held it up to Shayne. "Guess you can use this."

Shayne took the cup. He didn't like rye, but this morning he wasn't feeling particular. The whiskey helped take some of the edge from his nerves.

"Got a surprise for you," Tim said, settling back. He waved to the lone chair in the cubicle.

"Sit down, Mike. You won't like what I've got."

Shayne knew Tim well enough to sense the reporter was not joking. He poured himself another shot of Tim's whiskey, sat down.

"Berlinda?"

Tim nodded. "I told you I thought I'd seen her somewhere before, didn't I?"

He lighted a fresh cigarette. "Never forget a face or a figure," he went on. "Especially a face and a figure like hers."

He reached inside a file folder on his desk, took out a faded newspaper clipping.

"Berlinda Isley, former Chicago model, married to Joseph Evans, small-time Miami Springs contractor. Two years ago." He handed the clipping to Shayne. "She's been living there ever since. Quoted as saying she was happy to have given up her career in Chicago, wanted no publicity, just a quiet life as a housewife."

Shayne studied the picture in the faded clipping. He couldn't recall reading it. He might have been out of town at the time. Anyway, he would have been hard put to recognize her. Berlinda had been snapped standing in front of a modest suburban home and in no way resembled the sleek, laughing girl he had gone out with last night. She was wearing a plain

house dress, dark sun glasses and had put on weight.

"You didn't know she was living in Miami Springs?"

Shayne shook his head.

"Then she didn't tell you she was married." Tim was puzzled. "What did you talk about last night?"

"Mostly about that week in Chicago. She told me she was down here on a modeling job. I believed her."

Shayne got up, tugged at his ear lobe. So Berlinda had married and was living in Miami Springs, a small community just outside Miami. Why had she kept it from him last night? Had she been ashamed of it? Bored? Restless? A housewife out on a fling? It happened.

But it didn't explain why she had been killed. It didn't explain the card in her purse, or why someone had searched his apartment.

Shayne crumpled his empty paper cup, tossed it into Tim's wastebasket. "How long can you hold the story, Tim?"

Tim shrugged. "I'd kill it, if it was up to me. Carl would go along. But we've got competition, Mike. The *Herald* would love to get a jump on us."

Shayne grinned. "I understand."

"Won't be much in the afternoon edition, anyway," Tim volunteered. "Painter was

close-mouthed when I called him. He did say she was a Chicago model named Berlinda Isley. Where her body was found. He had a few leads. He didn't mention you at all."

A smile tugged at Shayne's mouth. Painter was giving him some rope. He ought to be grateful for that.

"I'll keep checking," Rourke said. "I've got a friend on the Chicago *Trib.* Call me later in the afternoon. I might have something for you, Mike."

Shayne nodded. "Thanks, Tim."

Miami Springs was a short drive out of Miami, up along the Miami Canal. There was no one at home at the address mentioned in the clipping, but the mailbox had Evans' name lettered on it.

Mike Shayne drove to a pay phone, looked up Evans in the yellow pages. There was a small box under contractors listing an EVANS & SON—room additions, remodeling, etc.

The office was located in a nearby shopping center. Shayne wanted a look at the man. He had had only an eye-corner glimpse of the gunman who took a shot at him in the garage but had retained his general configuration. The big redhead couldn't rule out the probability of a jealous husband following his wife, killing her.

The woman tending the office phone was past middle age, sharp-eyed, white-haired. She answered Shayne's question. "Mr. Evans is out inspecting a job." She gave him the address. Evans was subcontracting the plumbing on some tract homes going up on the outskirts of town.

Shayne found the place, drove past piles of lumber and men hammering on partitions, made inquiries and was directed to a man in a tin hat jotting down figures on a clipboard.

"Yeah," the man said sharply to Shayne, "I'm Joe Evans. You the new plumbing inspector?"

Shayne said he wasn't.

Evans was not the man in the garage. The shadow he had glimpsed was taller, thinner. Evans was at least six inches shorter, stockier, muscular.

Shayne showed Evans his private investigator's license.

"I want to talk to you about your wife," Shayne said.

Evans stiffened. "Why?"

"When did you see her last?"

Evans stared at the redhead. "Is she filing for a divorce?" His lips tightened bitterly. "I guess I knew it was coming." His voice broke as tears came into his eyes. "I knew when I married her I couldn't hold her—not Berlinda. I tried. I tried every way I knew how..."

Shayne waited while Evans gained control of himself, then said, "She's not filing for divorce."

Hope lightened Evans' eyes. "Then Berlinda's coming back?" "I don't think so," Shayne said quietly. He hated to kill the light in this man's eyes.

"Where is she?" Evans blurted. "I've been going crazy ever since she left. I don't care what she's done. I'll go down on my knees to get her back."

"You won't have to," Shayne said. "You'll find your wife in the Miami city morgue."

He turned away from the look in Evans' eyes. It was a rotten thing to do, but the police would not have been any easier on the man.

IV

SHAYNE DROVE BACK to Miami, stopping along the way for gas and a hamburger. He would have preferred brandy in his coffee, but this was a one-armed joint presided over by a surly counterman who was no booster of Florida's tourist trade.

It was well past noon when he rolled down Miami Avenue and turned west on Flagler Street. He parked the Buick a half block from his office, slotted a dime in the parking meter. He usually parked inside

the building garage, but he didn't expect to stay long in his office.

He had tried calling Lucy on his car phone, but both times the lines were busy.

He was striding toward the building entrance when a long blue Chrysler slid past, pulling sharply in to a curbside parking space just beyond. It was a late model with a New York license tag.

Shayne broke his stride, looked back. The car door opened and a tall thin man stepped out. He was wearing a dark gray suit, Navy blue shirt, cream colored tie. He glanced at Shayne as he turned, moved on toward an open-air newsstand.

Shayne slowly scraped his thumbnail along the red stubble on his jaw. Cars with New York license plates were a dime a dozen in the Miami area this time of year.

But this car, he remembered, had been in Miami Springs just a little while ago. It had turned into the same shopping center when he had gone there to look up Joe Evans. He had made a mental note of it, tucked it away in the back of his mind. The redhead had a habit of noting the apparently little things.

He wanted a closer look at the tall man. He took a cigaret from a crumpled pack, stuck it

in a corner of his mouth and made a pretense of searching for a light. Finding none, he walked up the sidewalk past the parked Chrysler and glanced inside. The driver was a bull-necked man with a pug's knuckle-scarred face under a chauffeur's cap.

The tall man was thumbing through a girlie magazine when Shayne came up. The powerfully built redhead spotted the bulge of a shoulder gun under the tight-fitting suit coat.

Shayne said, "Got a match, buddy?"

The man turned a cold, startled gaze on Shayne. He was a man about thirty, dark-complexioned, narrow-faced. An old scar, crescent-shaped, marked the right side of his jaw.

He slipped an ornate gold lighter from his pocket, held the flame under Shayne's cigaret.

Shayne said casually, "My office is on the third floor. If you're still here when I come back down, I'll break your arm." He jerked a thumb toward the Chrysler. "Tell him, too."

He blew smoke into the tall man's face, walked back to the office building and went inside.

Lucy was at her desk behind the railing when Shayne pushed open the door and

walked in. She was talking on the phone.

Shayne said: "Hi, Angel," and walked to the water cooler in the corner.

Lucy looked up, gave a gasp of relief and said quickly into the phone. "He just walked in. Yes, he seems to be all right. Yes, I'll tell him."

She hung up, swiveled around to face Shayne. She looked upset, worried. "Michael, where have you been?" She pushed a strand of brown hair back from her face. "I've had calls all morning for you. I tried to get you at your apartment."

"Been busy," Mike Shayne said.

Lucy came to her feet. "Is that all you can say? After I've been worrying about you all morning?"

Shayne grinned. "You worry too much, Lucy. I'm fine." He glanced idly toward the phone, then added, "Who was that on the line?"

"Tim." Lucy was genuinely concerned. "Someone has to worry about you, Michael." She picked up a newspaper from her desk. "Have you seen the *Herald*?"

Shayne hadn't, of course. He told her so.

The *Herald* featured the story on the front page, giving it a three-column head.



MIKE SHAYNE, WELL KNOWN PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR INVOLVED IN MURDER OF CHICAGO MODEL

Shayne sat on the corner of Lucy's desk and read the news report. It mentioned that he had been out with Berlinda the night before, that he had known her in Chicago, and that Miami Beach police were questioning him in connection with her brutal murder.

There was mention of his card found in her possession, but nothing about Shayne's gun. Painter had prudently kept this from the reporters, either because ballistics had not yet confirmed that the bullets which killed Berlinda had come from his gun, or the D.A.'s office had warned him to go slow until he had more defi-

nite proof of Shayne's involvement.

The D.A. was a young man, a friend of Mike Shayne—the redhead had been instrumental in getting evidence for him in several tough cases.

"Is it true?" Lucy asked. Then, "Is it?"

"About Berlinda?" Shayne nodded. "Most of it."

Lucy shuddered. "Poor girl! It must have been she who called last night. I was just leaving the office. She said she was an old friend of yours, that she was in town only a few days and wanted to get in touch with you. I told her you could be found either in the Beef House or the Seminole Room."

It explained how Berlinda had found him, but it still didn't answer why. When he found the answer to that, Shayne reflected grimly, he'd know who had killed her and tried to frame him with his own gun.

He swung around to Lucy. "What did Tim want?"

"He said to tell you he was going to the Beef House. He wants you to join him there."

Shayne nodded. "Who else called?"

"Chief Gentry. He didn't say what he wanted." Lucy glanced at her call pad. "Then there was a call from a Gene Hadley."

Shayne frowned. "Gar Anderson's campaign manager?"

"He sounded a bit grim," Lucy said. "He wants to see you at campaign headquarters on Ninth street. I think it has something to do with that story in the *Herald*."

Shayne rubbed his earlobe. Berlinda's killing was beginning to have ramifications all over town.

He went to the window, looked down on Flagler Street. The blue Chrysler was gone. This bothered Shayne. The cold-eyed man with the scar was not the type to be easily intimidated. Nor was the bullnecked driver.

He motioned for Lucy to join him.

"There was a blue Chrysler with New York plates parked at the curb," he told her. "I think it followed me back from Miami Springs."

Lucy was visibly alarmed. "Michael—you're in danger?"

"I can handle myself," Shayne said, "but I think you may be. I want you to lock up and go home early. Stay there until you hear from me."

Lucy tried to protest. The redhead put an arm around her waist and kissed her gently. "Do as I say, Lucy."

He stopped by the desk, put in a call to Hadley. The lines were busy. Shayne hung up.

He'd see what Hadley wanted later.

Lucy stopped him on the way out. "Michael, it's been such a day, I almost forgot." She checked her call pad again. "A woman called. She wanted to talk to you... said it was very important. I told her you weren't in..."

"She leave her name?" The detective asked.

"No."

Shayne figured he had enough trouble for the moment. He said, "If she calls again, tell her I'm booked full."

Lucy nodded. "But she sounded so desperate. And—" Lucy checked her pad again—"she did leave a strange message for you. She said, 'Call Mike Shayne. He'll help.'"

Shayne stopped, spun around, said, "Read that message again."

Lucy did. "What does it mean?"

"I don't know yet." Shayne came back to the railing, ran his fingers through unruly red hair. "She leave a number where I can reach her?"

"No. She said she'd call back."

"Find out what she wants. I'll be at the Beef House."

Shayne opened the door, looked back. "Remember what I said, Lucy. Keep an eye on the street. If that blue Chrysler

comes back, lock the door and call Gentry."

Lucy nodded, but her eyes were both dark and frightened. "Michael, be careful."

He grinned. "As always, Ange."

He closed the door and went out.

V

SHAYNE DROVE UP Flagler Street and swung left on Miami Avenue. It was midafternoon, the kind of day ice-bound New Yorkers dream about in Florida—sunny, warm, with just enough offshore breeze to keep the traffic smog from building up.

The redhead kept his eye on the rear view mirror. No sign of the blue Chrysler. It didn't make him happy. He would have felt better if they had been tailing him—then he'd know where they were.

He swung into the Beef House parking lot, locked the Buick and went inside.

At this hour the restaurant was all but empty. There were a few loungers at the front bar, watching without much interest a political rally at Hialeah on the color TV.

Shayne glanced at it as he went by. Former Illinois Governor Gar Anderson was on the tube, speaking to a sizeable

crowd. He was likening his campaign to that of a horse race and predicting a fast start and ending up a long-shot winner.

Anderson was a handsome, smiling man with enough silver at his temples to give him a distinguished look of maturity. At the moment he was the front runner in a slate of Democratic hopefuls. His wife Ginger, platinum-haired heiress to a sugar fortune, was with him on the platform.

Pat, the bartender, was talking to someone at the far end of the bar and didn't see Shayne come in. The redhead spotted Rourke at their favorite booth and headed for him. Tim had a drink at his elbow, a bowl of popcorn in front of him and a cigaret in his mouth. He seemed engrossed on what was taking place on the television screen.

Mike Shayne settled his powerful frame in the chair across from Tim, said jokingly, "Hear one campaign speech, you've heard them all."

Tim pulled his gaze around to him. "Hi, Mike."

Shayne popped some of the popcorn into his mouth. "What's a cynic like you doing watching a political rally?"

Tim butted out his cigaret, ran a crooked grin. "Figured you'd be interested," he said.

"Especially in Gar Anderson."

"I'm an independent," Shayne said.

Tim snorted. "Being an independent doesn't absolve you from politics."

"It keeps me out of the primaries," Shayne said. He picked up Rourke's glass, smelled its contents, put it down. "When are you going to learn to drink?" he asked.

Tim fished another cigaret from his pack. "Booze is booze," he said. "I would have ordered for you, but I didn't know when you'd be here." He looked around for a waiter.

Shayne said, "Don't bother. I'll get my own."

He got up, walked to the bar. Pat spotted him this time and came over, his bald head gleaming in the soft light.

"Shayne, me boy," he greeted, "what's this I been reading about you in the *Herald*?"

"Nothing good," Shayne growled.

"And worse," Pat agreed, plucking a bottle of Martell from the back shelf and putting it on the bar in front of Shayne. He lowered his voice. "There's word out on the streets you're a marked man."

"New York or local?" Shayne asked.

Pat slid an uneasy glance along the bar as he placed a glass alongside the bottle. "Not

sure. Nothing definite yet. Just rumors."

Shayne took the bottle by the neck and picked up the glass. "Thanks, Pat."

He went back to join Rourke. "Herald got the jump on you," he said, settling down. "You read their afternoon edition?"

Tim nodded. "Nothing we could do about it." He shrugged. "Painter has a fair-haired boy on the *Herald*."

Shayne told him about the shooting in the garage, the stolen gun, the search of his apartment. Tim leaned back, whistled softly.

"Boy you are in deep!"

"And getting in deeper," Shayne said. "So far, Painter's hanging back. But once he checks out my story about dropping Berlinda off at the Fontainebleau."

"He'll still need more than that to go on," Tim said. He rubbed the tip of his nose, his eyes thoughtful, then added, "What happened in Miami Springs?"

"I found Evans," Shayne replied. "I told him about his wife. He seemed genuinely broken up." Shayne poured himself a shot of brandy, took a deep swallow. "I gathered he and Berlinda weren't getting along. He thought I was there about a divorce."

Tim was skeptical. "Lots of husbands act broken up after they kill their wives. Still—she could have bought herself another kind of trouble."

Shayne leveled a glance at the Miami *News* reporter. "Such as?"

"I checked with my friend on the Chicago *Trib.* Picked up some very interesting information about Berlinda." He paused, glanced at the TV screen where Governor Anderson was still speaking.

"Seems she was quite friendly with Gar Anderson, about three years ago. He was still governor then. More than friendly, according to my friend. Anderson's wife was away at the time, traveling in Europe. The whole affair was hushed up, then forgotten."

Shayne plucked at his earlobe. "Three years ago. And now Anderson is in Florida, running a presidential campaign."

"And Berlinda could make or break him," Tim put in. "A press interview at just the right time, backed by some old pictures...."

Shayne swung around to eye the man on the screen. A word to the press from Berlinda could have destroyed his chances. Was a shot at the Presidency worth murder to Anderson?

"There's more," Tim said as Shayne swung back to him. "Just about that time she was also in pretty heavy with Colly Galliano. Yeah, the same Colly who moved down here a few months ago. Galliano had a model agency in Chicago and Berlinda worked for him. The agency was just a front. There were a lot of rumors that Colly was in with the Syndicate, but no one ever proved it in court."

Shayne leaned back, frowning. He was thinking of the girl he had gone out with last night, the girl he had once met in Chicago, the girl he would never forget.

"Looks like she was working both sides of the street," Tim said quietly. "Colly and Anderson—"

A waiter interrupted. He had a call for Mr. Shayne. Shayne nodded, picked up the phone the waiter set on the table and jacked in.

It was Lucy.

The mysterious woman had called back. No, she didn't leave her name. Just a place for Shayne to meet her. Tonight, eight o'clock sharp. At the phone booth just outside the Surf Club Restaurant on the Marina.

Shayne said, "Thanks, Lucy." Then, before hanging up, "That blue Chrysler come back?"

Lucy said no.

"Good! Lock up and go home. Remember, stay there until you hear from me!"

"Michael!" There was concern in Lucy's voice. "Are you going to meet her?"

"Yes."

"It could be a trap."

Shayne had thought of that. It was a chance he had to take.

"Let me call Gentry," Lucy begged. "He could have some men—"

"No! Leave Gentry out of it, for now." Then, more gently, "I'll be all right, Lucy."

He hung up, went back to the table where Tim was waiting. "Do me a favor," he said. "Take a look outside. Tell me if you see a blue Chrysler with New York plates parked on the street."

Tim looked at him quizzically. Shayne said, "Go ahead, I'll explain later."

He watched Tim walk to the door, disappear. After a moment the Miami News reporter came back.

He nodded. "Parked across the street."

Shayne said, "Your Ford parked in the lot?"

Rourke said it was.

"Good! Let me have your keys." Shayne reached inside his pocket, put his own on the table in front of the reporter.

"Give me fifteen minutes. Then go out the back door, take

my Buick and drive it out. Pull up as soon as you can and get out, check the rear wheel like you're looking for a flat. I want them to know right away who's driving my car. I don't want you getting hurt."

Rourke said, "Who are they?"
"I don't know yet."

Shayne got up, took the bottle of brandy with him.

"Pay Pat," he said. "I'll call you later."

VI

TIM ROURKE'S old Ford was parked by the garbage bins behind the restaurant, close to an alley that led out to a side street. This suited Shayne. He started Tim's car, backed it around and went down the alley, turning north through an area of cheap bars, adult bookstores and so-called massage parlors that lately had been taking over this section of downtown Miami.

He had at least five hours before his meeting with the mysterious woman caller at the Indian River marina. The redhead decided he had time to drop in on Gar Anderson's campaign headquarters.

He kept an eye on his rear-view mirror. Evidently his ruse had worked. There was no sign of the blue Chrysler.

After a circuitous drive

through the shabbier section of Miami, the redhead detective finally turned back onto Ninth and parked on a side street close to his destination. Anderson's Miami campaign headquarters was housed in a vacant store fronting on Ninth.

There were posters in the big show windows and a large cloth banner above the door. With the Florida primary elections due on Tuesday, Anderson was concentrating the remaining days campaigning in and around the Miami area.

Shayne went inside. There were a lot of young people working at desks, opening envelopes, stuffing campaign literature into others, answering telephones. Anderson, at this point in his campaign, was still well financed.

A big picture of Gar Anderson hung on the back wall. The slogan under it read, *Our next President.*

A smiling, handsome man, Anderson had first come to national prominence as a whizz-kid prosecutor, as Illinois' Attorney General and from this springboard to Governor, from which platform he was now campaigning for the Presidency. A former union official himself, Anderson had achieved his greatest triumph prosecuting criminal elements inside the powerful labor unions dur-

ing his two terms as Attorney General.

An older woman with a desk nameplate that said she was Hetty Gable glanced at Shayne as the detective approached her desk. She was busy talking to a young man concerning the upcoming Saturday rally at Coral Gables and Shayne waited for her to get through.

The woman didn't know Shayne. He could have been just another creep looking for political favors, so she ignored him. The redhead began to get impatient; he was just about to take matters into his own hands when the door behind the woman's desk opened and Gene Hadley came out, clutching a sheaf of typewritten pages.

He was in shirtsleeves, his cuffs rolled up over powerful forearms, his collar open. In his early thirties, Hadley had the build of a linebacker. He had played college football for the University of Miami and had spurned a potential draft choice with the Dolphins and gone into law instead. Hadley was politically ambitious.

He came up to the desk, snapped, "Hetty, about this labor union speech—"

Shayne cut in: "Hello, Gene."

Gene flicked him an annoyed glance. "Look mister, I'm busy—"

He cut himself off then, said, "Shayne! I'm sorry." He waved a hand toward his door. "Come on in."

He dropped the papers on Hetty's desk, said, "Check this over. I'll get back to you later."

He waited for the detective to go in ahead of him, then closed the door behind them.

"I wasn't expecting you," he said in apology. "You should have called."

"I did. Your lines were busy." Shayne looked around the cluttered office. There were a desk, a filing cabinet and banks of shelves on the walls. The shelves held campaign literature, all but two which seemed to be the repository of a number of bicentennial gim-cracks, ceramic donkeys and other gifts of small value received in the mail from well-meaning citizens.

Hadley caught the detective's glance, said, "We get them every day. We have a man from the M.P.D. Bomb Squad check them out." He shrugged. "You never know . . ."

He waved the redhead to the one chair beside his own in the room, held out a box of cigars. Shayne said, "Too rich for my lungs," took a cigaret from his crumpled pack and lighted up. It wasn't like Hadley to be nice to anyone unless it paid off politically.

Hadley set the cigar box back on his desk, ran his fingers through thick brown hair. He seemed somewhat agitated, as if not quite knowing how to begin.

"Glad you stopped by," he said. He took a turn around the desk, paused, eyed Shayne. "That woman who was killed last night—the one they found at the city dump." He sat on a corner of his desk, went on. "You knew her, didn't you?"

Shayne nodded.

Hadley took a deep breath, said, "Look, Shayne—we're running a clean campaign. We've got a chance to take this state, make it all the way to the convention in July—"

The redhead cut in: "Is that why you called me?"

Hadley got up, started to pace. "You were out with her last night," he said. He swung around, leveled his gaze at Shayne. "I want to know what she told you. I want to know if she left something with you."

The redhead stood up. "Let's quit playing games, Gene. I know about Anderson and Berlinda, in Chicago, if that's what you mean?"

Hadley's lips came together in a tight scowl. "And the pictures?"

Shayne said, "What pictures?"

Hadley absorbed this for a



moment. "Blackmail," he muttered.

Shayne was surprised. "From Berlinda?"

Hadley shrugged. "Could be. A man called here yesterday, sometime between six and seven in the evening. He said he represented Berlinda. He had the letters and the pictures and he wanted a hundred thousand dollars, in cash, or the papers would get the full story Monday, the day before the primary."

Shayne frowned. "Did you talk to him?"

"No. I was busy doing something else. But Mrs. Anderson was in for a few moments. She took the call, told me about it. She was quite naturally upset over it."

"That's a matter for the police," Shayne said. "Why call me?"

Hadley settled in the padded leather chair behind his desk. "You were out with Berlinda last night. You knew her. I thought you might be..." He made a tired gesture, said, "It's been a hell of a campaign, Shayne. I'm worn out."

He showed a small, apologetic smile. "We've not seen eye to eye on a lot of things, but I know your reputation well enough to..." He leaned back in his chair, pinched the bridge of his nose. "I apologize right

now for even thinking you might be that man, Shayne."

Shayne's voice was dry, clipped. "Thanks." He stood up, butted his cigaret out in the ashtray on Gene's desk. "I've had a few doubts about you."

He glanced at the phone at Gene's elbow. The line light was blinking.

"Looks like you're on," Shayne said.

Gene shrugged. "A thousand calls a day. Campaign promises, favors..." He sighed. "Politics, Shayne!"

The big redhead grinned. "It's all yours." He turned to the door.

Hadley said, "You'll let me know, if you find out who..."

"Sure," Shayne said. "After I tell the police."

Hetty was talking on the phone as Shayne paused by her desk. The Andersons were staying at one of the newer and more sumptuous hotels at Miami Beach, but the big redhead wanted to make sure before he made a run out there.

"I'm a friend of Mrs. Anderson's," Shayne said, interrupting her. "Is Ginger back at her suite yet?"

Hetty put her palm over the mouthpiece, said, "She just got in. She asked me to hold all calls for the rest of the day..."

Shayne said, "Thanks," and walked out.

VII

RAIN CLOUDS WERE piling up over the Keys when Shayne came out of Anderson's campaign headquarters. At this time of the year the weather fronts came down from the north—it was too early for the hurricane season.

Tim's old Ford was balky as he turned onto Miami Boulevard heading for the causeway to Miami Beach. The detective glanced at the fuel gauge, shook his head. Tim never seemed to pay much attention to his car—it was a wonder it had lasted as long as it had.

Shayne drove it into the nearest gas station, told the attendant to fill it before going to the phone booth.

He missed the Buick. He could have made the calls from his car phone. He found two dimes and two nickels among his loose change and placed his first call to Lucy Hamilton.

She was at home. That relieved him. She was just as relieved to hear from him. No, no one in a blue Chrysler had followed her. She was sure of it. But staying home was not to her liking. Quite firmly, she told Shayne she'd be in the office first thing in the morning. She had work to do. She promised to call the police if she

spotted anyone who looked like trouble.

Tim answered his call at his desk at the *Miami Daily News*. "Yeah," he said, "they followed me down the street. Pulled up alongside when I stopped. A couple of mean-looking dudes, Mike. Not from around here though."

Shayne said, "Where's my Buick now?"

"Parked in my usual slot."

"Leave my keys under the car seat. I'll be around to pick it up."

"Already there," Tim said. Shayne heard him answer someone calling him in the city room. "Be right there, Carl." Then, to Shayne, "Where are you going?"

"Tell you later." About to hang up, Shayne said: "You owe me ten dollars."

"What for?"

"Filling your gas tank."

The detective hung up on Tim, dialed police headquarters, asked for Will Gentry. After a moment, the Miami chief came on, growling, "Yeah, Chief Gentry..."

"Mike Shayne."

There was a pause at the other end, then, "Figgers." A beat, then, "You locking horns with Painter again?"

"His doing," Shayne said. "Not mine."

"What's he got on you?"

"My gun," Shayne replied. "It was used in the killing of that girl, Berlinda, some time last night."

There was another pause at the other end of the line, then Gentry said drily: "Thanks for telling me, Mike."

Shayne apologized. "Damn it, Will, I've been on the run since early morning. This is the first chance I've had to call you."

"Where've you been?" the Chief asked.

"Chasing around. I'll explain the whole thing to you later," Shayne said. He didn't want a long phone conversation now. "About my gun, Will—someone stole it from my car. And I'm not kidding."

"Yeah, Painter told me," Gentry said. "Ballistics came up with a match. I think he believes your story. Anyway, he's holding off getting out a warrant on you."

"Nice of him," Shayne muttered.

"I know Painter rubs you the wrong way," Gentry snapped, "but he's a hell of a good man, Mike—and a fair one. He could have held you for questioning..."

Shayne cut him short. "All right, Will, lay off. I'm not worried about Petey Painter. But I need help."

"Well now," Gentry's voice rumbled drily, "I thought you

had forgotten there was a Miami Police Department, Mike."

Shayne grinned. "Getting touchy these days, eh?"

Gentry's voice came out crisp. "What do you want?"

"First—has anyone come in to the morgue to claim the body?"

"Yeah, a man claiming to be her husband. Name of Joe Evans. Made arrangements to move her to the Sandstrom Funeral Home in Miami Springs."

"Hmmm." Shayne ran his thumb and forefinger across his left earlobe.

"You knew she was married?"

"Not when I went out with her." Then, before Gentry could continue on the subject, "There's been a blue Chrysler with New York plates following me around. I want them checked out."

"Driver is a broken down pug named John Koskovitch. Fought in Brooklyn under the name of Tiger Kosko. The tall thin man with the scar on his chin is Lou Goss. Rumored to be a hit man for a New York gang."

Shayne whistled softly. "Big time, eh?"

"Big enough," Gentry replied. "I make it a point to know who comes in and out of my town, Mike."

"What are they doing down here?"

"They've been out to see Colly Galliano. That's why we checked them out."

"Can you get them off my back?"

"They do anything to you?"

"Not yet," Shayne growled.

"Then I can't," Gentry replied. "No warrant for them out of New York—nothing on them down here."

"How about a little polite police rousting?"

Gentry snorted. "That went out with those Hammett and Chandler novels, Mike. Try that today and I'd be up before the Commissioner with a high-priced lawyer charging police brutality, illegal stop and search, and a half dozen other things." Gentry sounded disgusted. "Useta be we could throw the book at punks like that... now their lawyers throw the books at us."

Shayne muttered, "Brave new world—"

Gentry cut in, "Play it on the safe side, Mike. These aren't cheap hoods. If you think they're in on that girl's killing, give me something to go on and I'll take it from there!"

Shayne said, "I'll let you know the moment I have something definite."

He hung up scowling, running this bit of news through

his mind. A hit man from New York tailing him—probably the same man who had taken a shot at him. Was he the man who had jimmied his glove compartment and taken his gun? Shayne didn't think so. But he was pretty sure it was Lou Goss who had gone through his apartment. Was he after the letters and photographs Berlinda was supposed to have?

The attendant had finished checking under the Ford's hood and was looking at him.

Shayne paid the man and drove off. He turned onto the causeway and stepped on the gas. The front wheels began to shimmy and seemed about to drop off and Shayne knew without looking at the speedometer that he was going over sixty. He eased up on the accelerator, watched a sporty Stingray zoom by and a few moments later a Miami patrol car, its lights flashing, passed him, running down the Stingray.

Shayne took it easy the rest of the way in. The Andersons had a suite in The Towers, one of the newer hotels on Collins Avenue. Shayne drove the Ford down a ramp into the below-level parking, picked up his ticket from the black attendant and took the elevator up to the lobby.

It was plush, ornate, deeply carpeted. The big windows facing the Atlantic gave a view of a dazzlingly white beach with a few bathers sunning themselves. A patio-ringed, Olympic-sized pool just outside seemed to be more popular with the hotel guests than the ocean.

Shayne crossed to the desk and asked for the Anderson suite. The desk clerk eyed Shayne's big, rumpled frame, the red stubble on his face and his manner was cool.

"May I ask who's calling, Sir?"

"Shayne—Mike Shayne."

The desk clerk was new to the area—the name meant nothing to him. He flicked his glance to a pleasant-faced young man in a business suit who had been sitting in a lounge chair within earshot of the desk. The man was coming toward them, a small smile on his face.

"Mr. Shayne?" the man asked.

Shayne turned. This man was not more than thirty. He looked like a young corporation executive. Everything about him was pleasant, except for his eyes. They were gray, cold, searching.

"May I ask your business with the Andersons?"

Shayne leveled a glance at him. "Who are you?"

The young man produced a wallet, flipped it open. The badge pinned inside said he was a Secret Service Agent.

Shayne said, "My business with Mrs. Anderson is personal." He took out his identification, held it out to the young man.

The Secret Service man studied it for a moment, handed it back. "I'm afraid," he said quietly, "that Mrs. Anderson is unavailable."

"Why don't you ask *her*?" Shayne said.

The man hesitated, then turned to the desk clerk, nodded.

The desk clerk punched out a number, waited a moment then said, "Mrs. Anderson? Just a moment please." He handed the receiver to the Secret Service Agent, who talked quietly into it for a moment, then handed it back to the clerk.

"She'll see you," he told Shayne. He gave a small shrug. "Suite 1109. I'll clear you with Charley."

He put out a hand as Shayne started to turn away. "If you don't mind . . ."

He checked the big redhead for weapons, giving him a quick, professional going over.

He stepped back, smiled, "Sorry," he said. "Regulations."

He watched Shayne stride to the elevator bank.

VIII

CHARLEY WAS A BIT older than the Secret Service man down in the lobby. Assigned to keep a watch on the Anderson suite, he screened Shayne as he stepped out of the elevator, waved him on.

Mrs. Anderson answered the door herself. She looked more angular than she did over TV, much too thin. She was several years older than her husband and it showed. She was wearing an expensive silk robe over her slip.

"Mr. Shayne?" She had a modulated, cultured voice. "Please come in."

Shayne looked the suite over. He felt grimy in her presence, tired.

"Mr. Hadley called a few minutes ago," she said. "He thought you'd be coming to see me." She motioned him to a brocaded chair. "We have a bar. May I get you anything?"

"Brandy," Mike said.

She went to the small bar in the room. "Straight? Seltzer?"

"Ice water on the side," Shayne replied.

She smiled. "There's an old saying you can always trust a man who drinks brandy."

It was vintage Napoleon and she poured three fingers into a small brandy snifter, some water from an ice pitcher into a



small tumbler and brought them to the redheaded detective.

"You are looking for the man who killed Berlinda Isley?"

Shayne nodded. "Man—or woman."

Mrs. Anderson studied him for a beat, a small pulse visible in her throat. "Is that why you came to see me? You think I—"

"Know something I don't about Berlinda," Shayne put in bluntly.

She was quiet for a moment. She had level blue eyes, a small mouth. Mrs. Anderson was not a beauty, but she had been born to money and the sort of power money brings, and she wore it like a cloak, a Givenchy

original tailored just for her.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne," she said coolly, "but I'm sure you knew her better than I?"

Shayne shrugged. "I met her in Chicago five years ago. I didn't see her again until last night." He paused to take a long swallow of the brandy. "But then, you must have read all that in the afternoon papers, Mrs. Anderson."

Mike waited as she reached across the coffee table, plucked a long unfiltered cigaret from a marble-topped box, fitted it into an ivory holder.

"She called my husband twice when we first came to the Miami area. Gareth was quite surprised to learn she was living in Florida. And, perhaps, a little embarrassed."

She paused. She was used to having men light her cigarettes for her and she accepted the courtesy with instinctive grace as Shayne fumbled in his pocket for his lighter and held it out to her.

"Gareth shouldn't have been," she went on. She leaned back in her chair, shrugged. "I knew about his Chicago escapade."

"What did Berlinda want?"

"I really don't know. I didn't ask."

That was a lie. There wasn't a woman in the world who wouldn't want to know why another woman, a damned at-

tractive one at that, had called her husband.

"I don't believe you," Shayne said bluntly. "She and your husband were pretty close in Chicago."

For just a moment something hard and bitter showed in her eyes. She stood up, made a turn, looked back at him, tall, cool, poised.

"You want to know the truth?"

"Why not?"

"She called my husband, told him she was tired of being a housewife. She wanted to see him again. She persisted. Of course my husband refused."

Shayne nodded. "Bad politics."

"You know what would have happened if Henry *had* seen her and reporters got wind of it? The state papers would have had a field day. And you know what this sort of publicity did for poor Wilbur Mills. It would kill my husband's chances here in Florida, and Gareth needs a win here. Needs it badly."

"Bad enough to kill for?"

Mrs. Anderson stiffened. "Mr. Shayne," she said acidly, "my husband wants to win here. So do I. But no primary is worth killing for—not even a presidential election!"

"How about blackmail?"

She looked at him for a moment. "Hadley told you?" She

came back to her chair, sat across from the detective. "I took the call last night. It was a man's voice, threatening. He wanted money. He said he represented Berlinda."

"You tell your husband?"

"No. I didn't want to alarm him. I did talk it over with Gene—Mr. Hadley. I do have money. We were ready to make a counter offer when he called again. But he hasn't called. That's why I'm here instead of out in Coral Gables with my husband this afternoon. In case—"

Shayne finished his brandy, stood up. "You do want your husband to win this primary, Mrs. Anderson?"

"And others," she said quietly. "Henry would make a good president."

She walked to the door with Mike. "I'm sorry she was killed. I want you to believe that, Mr. Shayne."

He looked into her cool blue eyes. He did not see sorrow in them.

He said, "Good day, Mrs. Anderson. And thanks for the brandy."

Shayne rode the elevator down to the parking level, paid off on his ticket, and drove Tim's Ford out onto Collins Avenue. A rising wind rustled among the line of palm trees along the street. The clouds had

come up enough to blot out the sun.

Someone had stolen his gun and killed Berlinda with it. Because she was blackmailing Gar Anderson? Maybe. Anderson was rolling for high stakes, and he had only Mrs. Anderson's word that a man had called her, saying he represented Berlinda and asking for a hundred thousand dollars.

But someone—Lou Goss?—had searched his apartment while he was away? What for? The photos and letters Berlinda was supposed to have?

Who else knew of their existence? Colly Galliano could have. Berlinda had worked for him during the period she was seeing Anderson. He could have been the man who called Mrs. Anderson.

Shayne plucked at his earlobe as he drove back across the causeway. Why? For money? A man who could buy the Hayes place and ring it with security guards didn't need a few thousand more. But, if there were some reason why Galliano wanted to force Anderson out of the primary race...

A car skidded across the road ahead of him, front tires flattening. A woman's white face stared at him as Shayne's quick reflexes spun the Ford around her, barely avoiding a collision. He glanced into the rear-view

mirror and was glad to see she had made it to the parking lane without incident.

He swung into a gas station on the Miami side, stopped by a phone booth and put in a call to Lucy. He let it ring for a long time before hanging up. He was worried. It could be she was in the shower, or she might have stepped out for a bite to eat.

But worry lay in the back of his mind as he climbed back into the Ford and drove north.

He wanted to talk to Joe Evans again. The man had seemed genuinely shocked at hearing of his wife's death. Still... Evans was the only other man who could have known of the damaging Anderson letters and photos.

A late-model car with an EVANS & SON, Contractors sticker on the rear window was parked in the driveway when Shayne pulled up by the curb in front of Joe Evans' home.

He walked to the door, ducking around a hanging flower pot, and rang the bell. He could hear it ring inside. He waited, tried again, then impatiently put his big hand on the knob and pushed.

The door opened easily.

Something was wrong! Deadly wrong! Shayne's thick body went on alert as he moved down the tiled entryway.

"Joe Evans!"

His voice seemed to echo inside the house. Shayne turned into the living room, stopped dead.

Joe Evans lay on the floor, crumpled, one hand reaching toward a nearby suitcase. He was dead. The suitcase was open, clothing and personal items scattered around...

Mike Shayne knelt beside the body. It was still warm. Someone wielding a heavy object had crushed Joe's skull. There was nothing Shayne could do for him now.

The redhead straightened, stared around the room. The place was a mess. A small desk had been rifled, books scattered out of a built-in bookcase, sofa cushions were disturbed.

Shayne didn't touch a thing. It looked as if Joe Evans had packed a suitcase and was ready to leave when the killer walked in on him. Why? Because he, too, had received a threat?

Shayne swung around as he heard school children coming down the walk. One of them was using a skateboard, the others running after him.

He stopped by the phone stand, waiting for them to go by. There was a pad by the phone with a name scrawled on it, and a telephone number. Shayne's jaw ridged. *His name, and his office phone number!*

It could be Evan's handwriting. Maybe the man had meant to call him. The killer must have seen it. He had let it stay.

Something for the police to find—something for Petey Painter to chew on?

The redhead ripped the sheet off the pad, stuffed it into his pocket as he went out.

IX

SHAYNE STARED GRIMLY through the Ford's windshield as he drove back to Miami. Rain began to splatter against the windows. He turned into the *Daily News* parking lot, left Tim's Ford, found his keys under the Buick's seat where Tim had put them and drove off.

He was tired, itchy. He had been on the go since five thirty this morning. He needed a shower, a change of clothes. He needed something more than a greasy hamburger inside his stomach.

He showered and shaved and changed into other clothes. The clock told him he didn't have time to fix anything to eat. He made some instant coffee, poured two fingers of cognac into it and drank it on the way out.

A Chevvy moved away from the curb as Shayne drove the Buick out and headed for the

marina. There was a woman in the back seat. She kept dabbing at heavy eye makeup.

The rain came down heavy for a while, then eased up. It was dark now—street lamps gleamed wetly. Across Biscayne Bay the myriad lights of Miami Beach's high-rise hotels shone against a dark sky.

The rain had stopped by the time Shayne reached the Indian River Marina. A sea of small craft lay moored to their slips, the masts of bigger yachts topping them like spires in the night. Among them dozens of houseboats rode their mooring lines, homes for modern-day vagabonds who roamed the inland waterways as far north as Chesapeake Bay in summer.

Mike Shayne drove slowly along the waterfront street and parked by a fish shanty, locked up for the night. The Surf Club Restaurant was just beyond, at the head of a wide pier that jutted out into the water.

He sat inside the Buick and eyed the enclosed phone booth by the side of the restaurant. People were drifting in and out of the Surf Club. One of the larger houseboats was holding a party. He could hear laughter, loud talk, all the convivial sounds of people having a good time.

The redhead glanced at his wristwatch. It was just eight

o'clock. He got out of the car, walked toward the booth. Behind him the old Chevy rolled to a stop a half dozen yards behind the Buick.

Shayne waited by the phone booth as a couple of minutes ticked by. No one showed. He was about to turn away when the phone inside began to ring. He hesitated a moment, then shoved the folding door open, stepped inside and picked up the receiver.

A woman's voice said quickly, "Hello—who is this?"

"Mike Shayne."

The voice gasped with relief, "Mike—thank God!" It sounded vaguely familiar.

Shayne said, "Who are you?"

"Deedee Williams."

The name rang a distant bell. The voice on the other end helped him remember.

"Chicago—'73. The Black Cat Club—Berlinda's roommate."

It came back to Shayne. A black-haired woman, a bit older than Berlinda, not as pretty, but a better actress. Married once, divorced.

What was she doing in Miami?

He said, "We had an appointment."

"Yes, yes." She sounded terrified. "But something's happened. I can't make it tonight. That's why I called. I hoped you'd be there to answer."

"You know who killed Berlinda?"

"Yes." There was a pause at the other end of the line, then, "I'm performing at the Flamingo Club. You know where it is?"

Shayne did.

"Can you come here right away? I must talk to you."

Shayne was looking through the rain-streaked glass of the phone booth, his attention caught by two men and a girl who came out of the car parked behind the Buick. They stopped and one of them pointed toward the booth.

Deedee's voice sounded in his ear: "Shayne, are you still there?"

"Yes," Shayne said grimly. "I'm here." Lucy had said it might be a trap.

"Please hurry!" Then, "Just in case I—look for the crying Buddha."

There was a click at the other end of the line. Shayne hung onto the receiver for a while, frowning.

The crying Buddha?

He hung up, stepped outside as the two men and the girl came toward him. Shayne recognized the bull-necked man as the driver of the blue Chrysler, the man Gentry had identified as ex-pug Tiger Kosko. But the man with him was not Lou Goss. He was shorter, stockier,

his face pockmarked, ravaged by drink—a wharf rat, hired for a dollar and a bottle—a man with no past and no future.

The three of them stopped a few feet from the redhead. Kosko pointed a finger at him.

"That the sonuvabitch, Rita?" He said it loudly, attracting the attention of people coming out of the restaurant.

The girl was cheaply dressed, heavily made up, wearing a skimpy, lipstick-red dress. It was torn at the left shoulder, revealing part of a shapely breast.

"Yeah, that's him!" She raised her voice. "Tried to rape me!"

Mike Shayne eyed her grimly. He had to admit the ruse showed imagination.

"Look," he said, "I don't know what happened to you, sister. But you've picked out the wrong—"

Kosko cut in, his voice heavy. "You sure that's him?"

The girl nodded, pointed a finger at Shayne. "Damned pervert. Sure, I know who did it! He's just trying to weasel out of it."

The smaller man beside her drew a knife from his pocket, a six-inch blade flashing as he touched a spring release.

"I'll take care of him," he said and made a run for Shayne. He had used a knife



before—he held it close against his side, ready to slash upward when he closed in.

Shayne moved quickly, side-stepping and chopping down hard with the edge of his right palm against the side of the pock-faced man's neck as he lunged by. The blow sent the knife wielder smashing into the phone booth, shattering the glass.

Blood appeared on his face as he slid down, still holding the knife. Shayne ground his heel down on the man's knife hand, crushing small bones. The man gave a sharp cry of pain, pulled his hand up to his stomach,

held it with the other as the redhead snatched up the knife and hurled it far out into the darkness.

The girl screamed and backed off as Kosko made a rush for the detective. He had held back, waiting for his companion to deal with Shayne.

Shayne ducked as Kosko drove a fist at his face and slammed his own right into Kosko's midsection. Kosko grunted. He backed off, drew a pair of brass knuckles from his pocket, slipped them on.

A crowd had gathered outside the restaurant to watch. Someone said, "Hey! Somebody better call the police."

Shayne circled warily. Kosko moved in, flatfooted, confident. Shayne hit him twice before the bull-necked man landed a blow that grazed Mike's chin, drawing blood.

Kosko was soft in the stomach. Shayne tucked his chin under the burly man's shoulder, pumped lefts and rights into Kosko's midsection. Kosko gasped, began to back off. He brought his knee up into Shayne's crotch and fire burst in Mike's groin.

He shoved Kosko away, staggered back, jackknifed, clutching at his stomach. Kosko was an agonized blur in front of him. But the ex-pug had had enough. The girl was still

screaming. Kosko made a run for the parked Chevvy. Shayne tried to follow, couldn't.

The girl ran after him, grabbed Kosko's arm. He shoved her away, sent her sprawling. He slid in behind the wheel, started the motor, roared away.

Mike was breathing easier now. He turned to look for the pock-faced wharf rat, but the man had crawled away into the darkness. The girl was still screaming obscenities at the fast disappearing taillights of the Chevvy. Shayne went to her. She turned, saw him coming and backed off, raising her arm as if to ward off a blow.

Shayne said, "Easy, sister. I'm not going to hurt you."

She stared at his blood-streaked chin. "Jeez, mister—I didn't mean it." She was frightened, her eyes wide and dark. "He said it was just a joke—nobody would get hurt. He promised me a C-note."

"Where did he pick you up?"

She eyed him suspiciously. "You a cop?"

"No."

The girl hesitated. "Just outside the Oriental Massage Parlor. I work there sometimes." She shrugged. "You know the place?"

Shayne did—a front for prostitution.

She began to whimper. "The

Bastard ran off—he didn't pay me..."

Shayne wasn't sorry for her. He cut her off. "Consider yourself lucky," he said.

A siren sounded somewhere in the distance. Someone had finally called the police. Shayne had to get away before they arrived. He had to get to the Flamingo Club. He couldn't stand around answering questions.

The redhead made it to the Buick in a long-striding run. He was gone before the police car arrived.

X

THE FLAMINGO CLUB was on Route 95 in North Miami. A newly opened roadhouse restaurant, it had started out as a dinner house and only recently been renovated to include a stage show. It catered to the well-heeled winter residents as well as tourists able to afford the flat fifteen-dollar charge for stage show and dinner. Drinks were extra.

Off-Broadway plays performed by second and third rate touring companies were preferred—and the raunchier the play the better it was received.

Tim Rourke had attended the opening. He had asked Shayne to go along, but Shayne was not

interested in Broadway plays and fifteen dollars was too much to pay for a dinner he could get at the Beef House for less and more to his taste.

He drove, pulled up by the door and reluctantly relinquished the Buick to a uniformed parking attendant, then looked back as car tires squealed, uttered an oath against all young and reckless parking attendants, went on inside.

A scantily clad hostess, her low-cut gown showing most of what she obviously considered her best assets, eyed him with menu in hand. The blood on Shayne's cheek disconcerted her.

"Hello," she said coolly. "Do you have a reservation?"

Shayne was looking past her, toward the dining room. The lights were dim and he couldn't make out much beyond the first table.

"No," he said, "I'm not staying for dinner."

"Oh?" She looked confused now. "I'm sorry. If you want the bar—"

"I'm looking for Deedee Williams," Shayne cut in. "And I'm in a hurry."

She backed off slightly, looked past Shayne and motioned with her menu to someone. Shayne turned. A man in dinner jacket and small

black waxed mustache came up.

"I'm the manager," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I want to see Miss Williams," Shayne said. "I'm a friend of hers."

The manager looked him over coldly, obviously didn't believe him. "Look, mister," he said firmly, "why don't you just leave quietly?"

Shayne showed him his identification. "She called me a few minutes ago," he said. "Now if you'd rather explain to the police—"

The manager did not want trouble. "Miss Williams is onstage right now. I'm afraid you'll have to wait."

Shayne slipped a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet, held it up between his fingers.

"How long?"

The manager's face didn't twitch a muscle. "About thirty minutes." His hand came up and the twenty disappeared. He turned to the hostess. "Show Mr. Shayne to Miss Williams' dressing room."

The hostess turned, started off. Shayne followed her into the dining room. Small candles flickered inside colored glass holders. The brighter lights were on the small stage where two people were squared off in a bedtime marital argument.

The man was wearing pajama bottoms, the woman a

flimsy nightgown that hid very little. It was a screaming scene, full of four letter words.

Shayne paused. The woman was Deedee Williams. She had not changed much in five years. The soft stage lights were kinder to her than he remembered.

But what held him was a table up front, occupied by three men and a woman. Two of the men Shayne did not recognize. The woman he knew only from the *Daily News'* social page—a middleaged and wealthy socialite, a jet setter, recently divorced.

The third man was Colly Galliano. Prematurely gray, his face deeply tanned, his body kept in trim by massage and exercise. A silver-headed cane was propped by his side.

The hostess looked back at him, pointed toward a side door. Shayne shook his head, said, "I'll wait here." He was up against the back wall, beside a closed door with a small neon sign indicating rest rooms were behind it.

The hostess shrugged and walked away.

Shayne focussed his attention on Galliano. The underworld figure seemed intent on the onstage action. It was a badly written first act, the yelling and partial nudity hardly making up for its lack of substance—but it seemed to go

over well with the diners eating their veal Oskars and pompano.

Scantly dressed waitresses, all of them young and bosomy, moved among the tables, bringing drinks from the bar.

No one at Galliano's table noticed the redhead up against the wall. Galliano leaned over and said something to the woman next to him and she laughed brittly.

Onstage Deedee had quit yelling her lines and was preparing to go to bed, pouting over her "husband's" lack of aggressiveness. She turned, began to slip off her nightgown. Then her gaze fell on Galliano's table, and she froze!

Across the bed, the actor playing her husband said something angrily. Deedee didn't respond, didn't move. The man looked startled. He fed her her cue again, but Deedee began to back away from the bed, toward the wings. It was obviously not in the play. The actor began to adlib, his gaze turning in appeal to someone offstage.

Shayne came away from the back wall, alerted by the look on Deedee's face. Galliano seemed quite unaware of Deedee's reaction. He was talking with his woman companion. The two men with him were eating.

Suddenly Deedee's retreat halted. She turned slowly, her

face registering shock. A small bloodstain showed under her flimsy nightgown, just below her left breast.

The actor moving toward her saw it and froze. Deedee opened her mouth to scream. She never made it. Her knees buckled instead and she crumpled to the stage.

Shayne was already heading for her, running past the startled diners. Then someone closer to the stage screamed and pandemonium followed.

The redhead vaulted onto the stage and turned toward the wings. The shot had come from offstage. It had been fired from a silenced gun. The sound had not carried above the dining room noises.

Mike Shayne ran into the wings, turning into a short corridor that led past the kitchen to dressing rooms in back. A tall figure was running toward the back door . . . he turned and Shayne glimpsed Lou Goss' thin features as he ducked. The gun in Goss' hand made a soft snicking sound and a bullet splintered wood close by the big redhead's face.

Shayne waited a moment until he heard a door slam. He lunged back into the corridor, ran past the kitchen, where cooks and kitchen help, most of them Cubans, stared blankly at him.

He kicked open the back door, spun outside. He caught a glimpse of Goss at the far end of the parking lot, slipping through bushes bordering a quiet side street. A moment later a car motor started up and roared off into the night.

Shayne stood in the back doorway, seething with frustration. Goss had planned his getaway well. By parking his car on the side street, he had avoided identification by the restaurant lot attendant. It also provided him with a faster getaway.

Shayne went back inside and out onto the small stage. The dining room was all but empty. Galliano and his guests were gone. The underworld figure had more than fifty witnesses to testify he had had nothing to do with the killing of Deedee Williams.

The small brunette lay crumpled on the stage floor. She must have died instantly. The actor who had played her husband was sitting on the side of the bed, staring, a man in shock.

Shayne went into the manager's office to wait for the police.

XI

CHIEF GENTRY UTTERED an angry, "No!" His mouth clamped

grimly around the butt of a black unlit cigar and the veins stood out on his face. "I'm sorry, Mike—I can't do it!"

He had been summoned from his home in Bal Harbour where he had been dressing to attend a fund-raising dinner. He was in his black tux ruffled white dress shirt and black tie. His wife was waiting for him in their car outside.

"I can't go busting into Galliano's place without a warrant. Colly has some influential friends."

Shayne's jaw ridged. "You want the man who killed her?" he said, pointing to the body of Deedee Williams being wheeled out on a Gurney by two city ambulance men, "You'll find him there. Lou Goss—I saw him!"

Gentry rolled his cigar between his lips. "You saw him? Who else?"

"He ran by the kitchen. "Someone there must have seen him."

Gentry said, "All right—let's go talk to them, Mike." He glanced at his watch. "I'm due at a dinner in the Hilton, and I'm late now..."

Detective-Captain Len Sturgis was talking to the white-faced actor, taking notes. The dining room was cleared. The manager stood by—he looked shattered at what had happened.

Mike Shayne and Gentry went into the kitchen. Gentry asked the questions, got conflicting answers. The men were frightened and showed it.

Gentry eyed Shayne. "Well," he said, "you think they'll stand up in court?"

They walked back to the dining room. Gentry squared away on the big redhead. "Got a few questions to ask you," he said. "Did you go to Miami Springs this morning?"

Shayne nodded. "Went to see a man name of Joe Evans."

"Why?"

Shayne scowled. "Are you cross-examining me, Will?"

"I'm trying to save your neck," Gentry replied. "Painter's looking for you."

"Figgers," Shayne muttered.

"Joe Evans was the husband of the girl who got killed last night," Gentry went on. He chewed angrily on his cigar. "You went back to see him this afternoon?"

Shayne didn't deny it. "Somebody is trying to blackmail Gar Anderson. Letters, photos, between him and Berlinda. A shakedown—but I'm not sure if it was for money or something else."

Gentry said, "Evans?"

"I thought he might be. I wanted to talk to him again."

"And you found him dead?"

Shayne's gaze steadied on the



police chief. "I've never lied to you, Will. And I've always leveled with you. I found Evans dead, his skull crashed. This was on a pad by his telephone." The detective took out the slip of paper he had taken from Evans' home. "My name's on it, my office phone number. He could have been trying to reach me when he was killed."

Gentry rocked back and forth on his heels, a scowl on his face. "Damn it, Mike, you should have told me!"

"Yeah." Shayne took a bent cigaret from his pack and lighted it. "Look, Will, I knew Evans' killing would be on the wire, that you'd hear about it. I knew what Painter would think. He couldn't have been

more than a half step behind me all the way."

"He's putting a warrant out on you," Gentry snapped. "You can't blame him, Mike. From first to last you've been in this up to your neck. Your gun killed the girl this morning. You went to see Joe Evans and found him dead. Now"—he waved a thick arm toward the stage—"this killing."

He held up a pudgy palm as Shayne tried to reply. "Wait, dammit! I believe you! We've been friends a long time. But Painter's got a point. He wants you booked for questioning. He's not sold on your killing that girl, although it was your gun. But he figures you knew a hell of a lot more than you've told him—"

"I didn't," Shayne replied. "Not when I talked to him. But I think I've got a line on the whole puzzle now. Just give me twenty-four hours to run it down, Will?"

"Painter's getting an APB out on you, Mike."

"Twenty-four hours," Shayne repeated.

Gentry chewed savagely on his black cigar butt. "I shouldn't, but . . ." He looked toward the door. "I'll be at the Hilton. Keep in touch."

Shayne nodded. "Thanks, Will."

Sturgis was through talking

to the actor. He was coming toward Gentry and Shayne saw him stop, surprise in his eyes.

Shayne went outside. Other than his car at the far end, the restaurant parking lot was empty. Gentry's private sedan was drawn up by the entrance, a white-haired woman waiting in it. Further on a police car, its red light still whirling, nosed against the building side.

Shayne knew Mrs. Gentry, but they were not close. Chief Gentry kept his private life private. Shayne had met Will's wife only once . . . one of the few times the redhead had allowed Tim Rourke to drag him to see how the better half lives. Tim was the kind who was equally at home with Skid Row bums and the Bal Harbour set. A story, to the *Miami Daily News* reporter, was where you found it.

The redhead nodded a greeting to Mrs. Gentry as he went by. His keys were in the ignition. He started the Buick and rolled it out of the parking lot.

It had been a long day. He drove back to his apartment, parked the Buick in the hotel garage and went up to his rooms.

He was too tired to eat. He poured some brandy into a glass, drew some ice water and lay down on his bed to think.

Berlinda had sought him out

last night on Deedee Williams' advice, but for some reason had gotten cold feet and said nothing concerning the trouble she was in.

Colly Galliano had imported a hit man from New York to keep tabs on him. Why?

Joe Evans, Berlinda's husband, logically the only other person who could have known of the existence of the damaging letters and photos, had tried to call him just before leaving, destination unknown.

Deedee, Berlinda's one-time Chicago roommate, had been killed because she knew who had murdered Berlinda. Or had she?

Shayne knew Lou Goss, who had fired the shot. He had glimpsed enough of the man to identify him.

The answer hung tantalizingly in the back of his head. Impatiently, he swung his powerful legs over the side of the bed, sat up and drained the last of his brandy.

He couldn't stay here. Of more immediate concern was Lucy Hamilton. He didn't want her going to the office in the morning. He didn't want her exposed to trouble until he had this case settled.

Lucy still was not in. Shayne let the phone ring a long time. When he hung up there was a tight cold knot in his stomach.

He went to the window, looked out. There was a car parked across the street. With a man standing beside it. Another man was walking back to it from a phone booth on the corner.

Shayne watched them. They hadn't found whatever they were looking for at Joe Evans' place, either. Now Galliano's men were back, keeping tabs on him.

Somehow they must have known about Deedee Williams' call. They had stopped him at the marina just long enough for Lou Goss to beat him to the Flamingo. Colly Galliano's presence there with friends was a perfect coverup.

So far, they had been one step ahead of him, and Shayne was getting angry. Dammit, this was *his* town! He knew it like a book, had friends here, enemies. But these were outsiders. Like Chief Gentry, he didn't want outsiders like Galliano in Miami. He didn't like them coming in, framing him with his own gun, killing Berlinda, Joe Evans and now Deedee Williams.

The phone rang. Shayne picked it up. A smooth, hard voice said, "Shayne?"

The redhead clamped hard on the receiver. "Yeah."

"You're worried about your secretary?"

Shayne's voice thickened. "Galliano?"

The voice said, "You want to see her alive, you bring that letter Berlinda gave you to me. This is a private transaction, Shayne—no police."

There was little Shayne could do but play along with Galliano. He said grimly; "Where?"

"My place—the old Hayes residence. My men will meet you at the gate."

"You want the pictures, too?"

"Pictures?" There was puzzlement in Galliano's smooth voice. Then, anger edged it, "I don't know what kind of game you're playing, Shayne—but I want that letter! And just in case you need a little persuasion..."

His voice pulled back from the receiver, called to someone, "Bring her here."

There was a brief moment of silence, then Lucy's voice came over the wire, "Michael! I'm here at—"

There was a sharp cry of pain, then Galliano's voice came on again, hard and final. "Until noon tomorrow, Shayne. Call the police and you'll find her body floating in the Bay."

XII

MIKE SHAYNE SET the receiver down, walked to the window, looked out. The car was still

parked across the street, the driver standing beside it, smoking a cigarette.

Shayne went back, put in a call to the taxi stand on Second Avenue. The dispatcher answered. Shayne said he wanted Joe Kribs. The dispatcher said Joe was out on a call, but was due in any minute. Shayne told him to have Joe call him.

He went back to the bed, lay down on it, hands clasped behind his head. Galliano wasn't after the Anderson papers. It was something else—a letter Berlinda had had, a letter he wanted desperately.

The crying Buddha!

Shayne sat up, ran thick fingers through his hair. *"Just in case"* Deedee had said over the phone, *"look for the crying Buddha..."*

Shayne remembered it now—an old ironwood sculpture in Berlinda's Chicago apartment. An odd piece of Oriental carving. All other Buddhas Mike had seen had fat round bellies and laughed. But this one had a mouth that turned down and wooden tears frozen on his cheeks.

The work of some long forgotten sculptor with a sour stomach that day, or a migraine, or maybe just for the hell of it. It had attracted Berlinda when she came across it in a curio shop south of the

Loop and she had bought it.

She had told him it was her good-luck piece. "Whenever I feel blue I rub his belly."

That was the key. Shayne reached for the extension phone to call Gentry. It rang just as his hand closed over it. It was the cabbie, Joe Kribs.

Shayne said, "Yeah, Joe, I need a cab. No, don't come here. Listen close. Drive it up by the cigar store on Third Avenue and wait there. Keep the motor running."

Kribs' thin, excited voice came over the wire. "Jeez, Mike, you in trouble again?"

"No. But you will be if you're not there when I show up!"

He hung up, changed into old trousers, an older shirt and put on a seaman's pea jacket. He rummaged around further, found other items he wanted, packed them inside a battered suitcase.

He went back to the window, standing well back out of sight, and glanced down. They were still there, waiting. They knew his car. He remembered how they had fooled him with the old Chevvy. Two could play at that game.

He left the lights burning as he went out, took the back stairs down, emerged from the service entrance amid trash cans. There was a narrow alley leading out to a back street. Shayne ducked into it.

The cab was waiting for him in front of the cigar store. Shayne opened the back door and slipped inside, shoving his suitcase in ahead of him.

Joe twisted around to look at him. The cabbie was a small gnomelike man. His larynx had been damaged in a street fight long ago and his voice now came out thin and squeaky.

"Where to?"

"The old wharf, foot of F street."

Joe set his flag and drove off.

The area off F street was rundown, partially abandoned. It was a warehouse district, fronting on the Bay. A few boats rode at anchor, boats needed scraping, with paint peeling. Most of them had *for sale* signs tacked to them.

Joe drove the cab up by a dark marine warehouse and stopped. He looked back to Shayne, said, "Want me to wait?"

Shayne shook his head as he passed a ten-dollar bill over the front seat to the cabbie.

Joe squinted nervously into the darkness. "Bad place to be, Mr. Shayne. Even the cops patrol here in tandem squad cars at night."

"I know where I'm going," Shayne said. "You keep your doors locked and get back to your stand. If anyone asks, you didn't see me, understand?"

"Sure," Joe replied. "My lips are sealed."

The big redhead grinned. "You watch too many old movies, Joe."

He opened the door, stepped out with his suitcase and waited until Joe turned the cab around and headed back uptown. He stood back in the shadows until he was sure no one had followed him. Then Shayne pulled his seaman's cap down over his eyes, hunched up his peajacket collar and moved off along the rotting piers.

The squall had passed. Stars were beginning to show in the night sky. Waves lapped softly against barnacle-encrusted pier supports. The varied smells of low tide and rotting fish rode the air.

Further up the lights of an old saloon, *The Seafarer's Bar*, showed. It was a joint frequented by longshoremen, shady seamen, occasional gun-runners and drug-pushers. The women who drank here were as tough as the men and often as dangerous.

Mike Shayne headed for an old houseboat, tarpaper-roofed and paint-peeling, that lay at anchor just beyond the *Seafarer's Bar*. It was all alone at the end of a rotting slip, a light showing from its cabin.

Two men came out of the bar just ahead of Shayne. One of

them was drunk and mean. He eyed the detective, teetering to keep his balance, growled, "Hey, Mac—got a light?"

He had a cigaret burning between his lips. It wasn't a light he wanted—it was trouble.

His companion tried to pull him away. "C'mon, Steve—not tonight, huh?"

Steve shoved his companion back, turned and lost his balance. He fell heavily as Shayne walked by and the redhead heard his curse as he tried to get up.

Shayne walked on another twenty yards, looked back. The two men were stumbling away, becoming lost in the shadows. The redhead cut back and ran quickly up the rickety heaving plankwalk to the houseboat.

Someone inside was playing a piano—old New Orleans jazz rhythms from another time, another era.

The houseboat rocked gently as Shayne stepped aboard. The playing stopped. A second later the light went out. Shayne hesitated in the cabin doorway. It was quiet inside.

"Bo," he whispered. "It's me—Mike Shayne."

No one answered him. No light came on. Waves lapped softly against the side of the old houseboat. Shayne smiled. Old Bo Shad had ears like a coyote. He stepped down a short flight

of steps, stopped as something hard, round and cold pressed against the side of his neck.

"Forty rods to hell, Bo," he said into the darkness. It was an old saying around the New Orleans slums out of which Bo Shad had come and it had become a password. Only a few of Bo's intimate friends knew it.

The gun muzzle was pulled back from Shayne's neck. A plank creaked, then a light came on in the cabin.

Bo Shad uttered a genial, "Hi, Shamus."

He was an old black man, toothless, his hair like steel wool. A long lanky body, a basketball player's big hands with long supple fingers that could brush the ivories with feather lightness, grip a baseball or close with iron hardness around a man's neck.

Bo Shad had been all of these—a piano player in the saloons of old New Orleans, a baseball player before blacks were accepted in the major leagues, a short run with the early Harlem Globetrotters. He had killed a man with those hands, and served time.

Now he lived on a small pension in an old houseboat, on fish he caught and ate and sometimes sold. He had managed to get a small piano into the cabin, a cast-off which he had tuned himself. He played

the old jazz rhythms for himself and sometimes for friends.

Shayne took the "Hi, Shamus" greeting from Bo as he took a lot of other things from the old man. They were friends. Shayne had helped get Bo out of prison, working with the Dade County D.A.'s office, to prove that the motive had been self defense, not premeditation, digging up reluctant witnesses and getting Bo a new hearing.

Bo put the short-barreled .38 away in a drawer, picked up a bottle and two glasses and placed them on the oilcloth covered galley table.

He eyed the suitcase Shayne had brought with him. "You staying a while?"

"For the night," Shayne replied.

Bo grinned. "Sure—don't often have company I like." He pointed to a bunk. "Make yourself at home."

Shayne shoved the suitcase under the bunk, then pointed to the drawer where Bo had stowed his pistol. "You know that's a violation of your parole, Bo."

The old black man shrugged. "Young punks roaming the wharfs these days. No respect for age anymore."

He poured from the bottle, pushed the glass toward Shayne. "This your brand?"

Shayne eyed the label. "Martell?" He looked at Bo. "What did it cost you?"

"Never you mind," Bo said. "Don't touch it myself. Just keep it around for old friends."

He reached back into the cupboard, brought out another bottle, down a good five fingers, and poured himself a generous slug. It was raw Kentucky pot still whiskey. He drank it straight.

He said: "What brings you, Shamus?"

"Need advice—maybe help."

Bo straightened on his bench seat. He need that, Shayne thought—needed to be of some use to somebody.

"What do you know about a newcomer, name of Colly Galliano?" he asked.

Bo's black eyes glittered. "Man, you're askin' for trouble."

"I already have it," Shayne growled.

Bo put his glass down, went topside, looked around. He came back, sat down, said, "Anyone follow you here?"

"No. I made sure of that."

Bo relaxed. "Bad medicine," he muttered.

"What's on the grapevine?" The big redhead had his own connections, but Bo had lived here longer, knew every Skid Row bum and waterfront rat in and around Miami.

Bo took a long swallow of the

gut-burning liquor. "Word has it Galliano's laying low here. Bought out that big place on the beach up north . . ."

"I know that," Shayne cut in. "What's he hiding out on?"

"Grand jury investigation in Chicago. Union boss, name of Jake Brock, who disappeared a while back. Body was never found."

Shayne ran the thumbnail of his right hand along his jaw. "Yeah—I remember reading about it."

"The heat's on Galliano. That's why he's down here. Got a fast boat anchored in his cove. He can make Cuba in a hurry, if he has to."

Shayne considered this. The last piece in the puzzle had fallen into place.

"Lou Goss?" he asked.

"Brooklyn hood," Bo replied. "Real bad medicine."

Shayne shook a last cigarette out of his pack. "How seaworthy is this old tub?"

Bo frowned.

"Can it make it up the coast to Galliano's place?"

Bo leaned back. "Shamus, you're crazy!"

"It's a gamble. Are you up to it?"

Bo had never passed up a challenge in his life. He downed the rest of the raw whiskey, stood up. "I'll check out the engine."

Shayne nodded. "They still have a phone at the far end of the old pier?"

"Far as I know," Bo replied. "I never use it."

"Be right back," Shayne told him.

XIII

SHAYNE SHAMBLED down the plankwalk and headed for the far end of the pier. There was a phone on a post with a naked light bulb shining over it. He glanced at his wrist watch. It was almost midnight. He hoped Gentry was still partying at the Hilton.

The switchboard said they'd page him. After a while Gentry came on the line.

"Shayne?" he said. "Where in hell are you, Mike?" His voice lowered. "Painter's got men all over town looking for you—"

Shayne cut in grimly. To hell with Painter. They've got Lucy, Will—at the Galliano place."

The line went dead for a moment. Then, "You sure?" Gentry's voice was harsh.

"Yeah, I'm sure."

"All right, I'll go on it, Mike. I'll have a dozen squad cars—"

"No! Hold it, Will. First wail of a police siren, and Lucy will disappear. You'll be busting in without a warrant and, like you said, you'll be neck-deep in legal trouble."

Gentry spoke harshly. "Well, what do you suggest?"

"I'm going in alone."

"You're crazy!" Gentry's voice was an echo of old Bo's.

"Can you have a dozen men staked out at Galliano's place by early morning?"

"Sure," Gentry said. Then, gruffly, "Why? You just said we can't go busting in without a damn good reason."

"I'll give you a legal hook," Shayne said. "A minor one, but it'll give your boys an excuse to go in." He cut Gentry off. "You'll know it when you see it. I'll be inside, waiting for you."

He hung up before Gentry could start in on him and went back to the houseboat. It wasn't much of a run up the coast. If the old tub didn't sink they'd make it before daybreak.

Bo had finished tinkering with the engine. He went into the cabin behind Shayne.

"Still smuggling in those damn fireworks?" Shayne asked.

Bo feigned casual ignorance.

"Yeah." Bo smuggled them in from Mexico and Shayne knew it. "Need about three or four of those aerial bombs you got stowed away somewhere. And some oilskins to wrap them up in."

Bo looked at him. "Why?"

Shayne's smile was grim. "A hook—for Chief Gentry."

The motor coughed and began to put-put. Shayne slipped the mooring ropes free and stepped back aboard as Bo headed the clumsy craft away from the slip, out into the channel.

They headed north, the lights of Miami Beach on their right. The houseboat was doing seven knots at most. It would be a while before they neared their destination. Shayne went down into the cabin and stretched out on his bunk. In less than a minute he was asleep.

Bo stayed on deck, guiding the houseboat across the Bay. They slipped out under a low bridge into the Atlantic just beyond Bal Harbour and hugged the shoreline going north.

It was still dark when Bo cut the engine and dropped anchor. He went down into the cabin and woke Shayne.

"Just around the bend," he said. "Thought I'd better wake you."

Shayne stretched, stood up. The sleep had refreshed him. He was hungry.

"What have you got to eat?"

"Catfish," Bo said. "Ham hocks. Eggs."

He had a meal on the table in fifteen minutes. Coffee, spiked with cognac for Shayne, topped it off.

They went up on deck.

Ahead, the dark curve of Galliano's cove held trees, planted there by the former owner. The eastern sky was beginning to lighten.

Shayne pulled his suitcase out from under the bunk, took out a wet suit, flippers, face mask and air tank. Bo took his .38 out of the drawer as Shayne dressed.

"You'll need this," he muttered.

The big redhead slipped the pistol inside his wet suit, snugged it against his stomach.

"Let's go, Bo."

Bo started the engine and eased the old houseboat around the bend. Shayne took a position on the off side, ready to drop into the water at a moment's notice.

The old Hayes residence came into view as they entered the cove. The big house was set back from the beach, its windows dark. But the guest house, closer to the shore, showed lights. It was probably used as a guard house now, Shayne speculated.

The speedboat Bo had mentioned lay alongside a small pier. It had the lines of a converted cutter.

Shayne studied the small pine grove that came down almost to the shore line at the far end of the cove. He motioned to Bo and the engine coughed a

bit as the old man headed the houseboat in.

There was movement now by the guest house. Shadowy figures emerged, running along the small pier to the cutter. The sound of the houseboat engine was carrying across the quiet cove.

The cutter's powerful motors roared... a powerful searchlight blinked on, began to sweep the cove.

Shayne called, "Far enough, Bo."

The old man cut his engine and dropped anchor. He had a fish line ready. He dropped it over the side as the cutter pulled away from the pier and came roaring toward them.

Shayne adjusted his face mask. The tank was strapped to his back. He waved to Bo, dropped silently into the black waters.

The cutter came alongside. Two men armed with automatic weapons waited on the forward deck. The searchlight beam was pinned on Bo, who was holding up a hand to shield his eyes from the light.

One of the men said, "What in hell you doing out here, old man?"

Bo kept his eyes closed. "Fishing."

The two guards exchanged glances. The first one said, "This cove is private property."

"Mister Hayes didn't mind," Bo said. "He always useta let me—"

"This ain't Mister Hayes' place anymore," the guard cut in. "Now you turn that old tub around and get the hell out of here before we make Swiss cheese out of it!"

Bo started to shake. It wasn't all an act. "Yessir, mister. Yes-sir."

He started the motor, pulled up anchor. The men on the cutter watched as Bo headed back around the bend of the cove.

Shayne reached the shore unnoticed. He came out less than twenty-five feet from the grove. It was beginning to get light. The sun would be up soon. He crawled into the pine grove, slipped out of his wet suit, flippers, face mask and air tank. Bo's gun felt good in his fist.

He moved up through the trees, paused at the edge of the grove. A wide lawn bordered with flower beds separated him from the main house. Further down off to his left, a graveled driveway led to high iron gates. From them a stone wall completely surrounded the estate, except on the ocean side.

Shayne's attention turned back to the house as the front door opened and a stocky, bull-necked figure stood framed in it, looking off toward the

beach. Shayne had no trouble recognizing the ex-pug, Tiger Kosko.

The cutter was circling, heading back for the pier. Shayne glanced toward the main gate. Gentry had promised him a stakeout. And Shayne was going to need all the help he could get.

XIV

MIKE SHAYNE UNWRAPPED the oilskin pouch he had carried under his wet suit. The first fingers of the sun's rays began to steal across the dew-sparkling lawn. He unpacked three aerial bombs, short thick cylinders resting on flat wooden bases.

The redhead glanced toward the house. It was quiet inside. Behind him, from the beach, he heard the cutter's motors rev up for a short burst, then cut off. Shayne set the aerial bombs down in a row. Fireworks were illegal in Florida, even on the Fourth, except at controlled, licensed areas.

He touched a match flame to all three fuzes, made sure they caught, then straightened out and made a quick run for the front door. He reached it just as behind him, one, two, three, the aerial bombs whooshed up into the sky, arching toward the iron gates. At three hundred

feet in the air they exploded.

Shayne waited, pressed back to one side of the door. A moment later it was jerked open and Kosko stepped outside.

Shayne palmed Bo's gun. He was remembering Kosko's brass knuckles as he slammed the side of the .38 against the ex-pug's heavy jaw.

Kosko staggered back, blood spurting from his cheek. Shayne hit him again and the ex-pug went down heavily. Police sirens were sounding, coming up to the gate. A half dozen wildly scattered shots were fired.

Shayne plunged inside the house, his gun ready. Up on a balcony at the head of a curving flight of stairs, Colly Galliano, a silk robe over his pajamas, was just beginning to come down.

He stopped as he saw Shayne.

The redhead turned toward the stairs, spun around as Lou Goss came out of a side door. This time Shayne had the edge. He fired twice as Goss raised his gun hand. The bullets slammed the New York hit man back against the wall. He slid to the floor, his gun sliding out of his limp hand.

Shayne ran past him, up the stairs, taking them three at a time. Galliano turned, started to run back toward his room.

He stopped as Shayne fired a shot over his head.

From outside, Chief Gentry's voice blared over a bull-horn. "Stop all resistance. This is the Miami police. Stop all resistance."

Shayne walked up to Galliano. His fingers gripped Galliano's robe, jerking him close. "Where is she?" His voice was grim.

Galliano nodded toward a closed door. "In there."

Shayne spun him around, shoved him to the door. Galliano fumbled inside his robe pocket, produced a key and opened it.

Lucy was sitting on the edge of a bed. She was dressed. Shayne shoved Galliano in ahead of him as she stood up and cried. "Michael! Oh, Michael!"

She ran to him and he held her close. "Hi, Angel," he said. Then, a finger under her chin, lifting it. "Are you all right?"

She nodded. Then the tears came, the reaction...

Gentry entered, flanked by two of his men. "You damn fool!" he said to Shayne. "You could have been killed." But there was relief in his voice.

Shayne smiled. "How'd you like the fireworks?"

MIKE SHAYNE and Peter Painter, Miami Beach Detective

Chief, were in Will Gentry's office later. It was a preliminary hearing.

"It took me a while to put it all together," Shayne said. It wasn't until Galliano called me that the last piece of the puzzle fell into place."

"Get on with it," Gentry urged. "We've got Galliano locked up on a twenty-four-hour no-bail charge. Kidnapping. Lucy can testify, but only against Goss, who picked her up at her apartment. The D.A. will have to prove that Galliano hired Goss to do it, and you know what a smart lawyer can do with that."

"What about Lou Goss?"

"He's dead. Died an hour after he arrived at the hospital. But we checked out his gun. Ballistics came up with a match of the bullet that killed Deedee Williams. He probably killed Joe Evans, too." He shot a glance at Painter who up to now had not said anything. "We've got a hell of a good case against Lou Goss, but that won't do us any good if we can't prove he was hired by Galliano."

"Galliano isn't talking," Painter said, "he's letting his lawyers do it."

"Sturgis has been talking to Kosko," Gentry growled. "He might break. But up to now he keeps insisting he doesn't know

anything. He was just a driver for Goss. And he swears Goss didn't kill Berlinda."

"He didn't," Shayne said. "That was part of the puzzle I had to figure out." He turned to the small Miami Beach Detective Chief. "You'll find a thumbprint on my car's glove compartment door. It isn't mine. If you'll check it out..."

"We already have," Painter said. "Belongs to Joe Evans."

Gentry scowled. "You mean Berlinda's husband followed her, stole your gun and killed her?"

Shayne nodded. "But jealousy wasn't the real reason. He knew about the Anderson affair. And he knew his wife was getting restless. When Berlinda called Anderson, all she wanted was to see him again. It was Evans who took over and pitched blackmail.

That scared Berlinda. She hid the Anderson letters and pictures and came to Miami to see her old roommate, Deedee Williams. It was Deedee who talked her into coming to me for help.

Painter was restless. "All right, I'll buy that. Her husband killed her. But what do we have on Galliano?"

"A letter," Shayne replied. "I told you it was complicated."

Gentry swore, said, "Mike—Galliano's lawyers will have

him out of here by morning."

"Maybe." Shayne walked to Gentry's desk, picked up the phone.

"Berlinda wasn't the type to give up what she had in Chicago and settle down as a housewife in Miami Springs. Not unless she was hiding out."

"From Galliano?"

Shayne was dialing. "It took Galliano a long time to find out where she was..." He paused, added, "Give me Anderson's campaign headquarters phone number."

He jotted it down on a pad.

"Galliano killed Jake Brock, a top Chicago union leader, maybe on orders from someone else. The body was never found. A grand jury investigated, but didn't come up with anything they could pin on Galliano. Unless they find Brock's body..."

Shayne began dialing again.

Gentry scowled. "You mean Berlinda knew—put it all down in a letter?"

Mike Shayne nodded.

Painter said, "Well, where is it?"

"In the crying Buddha," Shayne replied, "along with the Anderson papers."

Painter looked at Gentry and shook his head. The Miami Police Chief took his cigar out of his mouth and slammed it into his wastebasket.

"Just what in hell," he

growled, "is a crying Buddha?"

Shayne was talking to someone on the line. "Gene? yeah, Shayne. You get any more gifts for Anderson?"

It took them twenty minutes to get to Anderson's campaign headquarters on Ninth street. They went in Chief Gentry's car.

Hadley pointed out the Buddha on one of the shelves in his office. "Came in yesterday," he said, turning to Shayne, "right after you left. Damnest looking thing I ever saw."

Shayne took it down, set it on Hadley's desk. "It wasn't at Berlinda's place in Miami Springs and it wasn't in Deedee's dressing room," he told Gentry. "I looked before you showed up."

He was feeling around in back of the ironwood sculpture. "Ah!" He pressed a toenail and a small drawer slid open. It held papers.

Gentry, Painter and Hadley crowded close as Shayne emptied the contents. The An-

derson papers and photos were in a small bound packet. He put them back unopened.

There was a long envelope which he did open. He glanced quickly down the handwritten page, handed it to Gentry. "Looks like this is what will nail Galliano. Jake's body is buried inside a fifty-gallon iron drum in an old well of an abandoned farmhouse."

Gentry nodded. "Shouldn't take the Chicago police long to verify it."

Shayne turned to leave. He was damned tired. All he wanted now was to go home and sleep for twenty hours straight.

He thought of Berlinda, left at the city dump—shot three times with his gun. Berlinda Isley, a girl not easy to forget.

The redhead turned and walked back to Gene's desk, ran his palm across the crying Buddha's round stomach.

One more time, one more for Berlinda—wherever she was now.

Next Month's Feature Stories—

YOU CAN BEAT A FRAME by BRETT HALLIDAY
DEATH OF A DON by DAVID MAZROFF
THE PACKING CASE by JAMES HOLDING
RUBOUT by EDWARD WELLIN

A SHOT UNHEARD



The fruits of success are sweet—unless they include a mad mistress named Lydia.

by GERALD FRANKLYN

I'D HOPED to be gone before Lydia returned from her afternoon courses at the university. Goodbyes of any sort can be very tenuous things, capable of going in either direction like unstable chemicals not yet known to be soluble to create their special equilibrium. I like to avoid chemical risks.

My morning had been spent in a numb flurry at eight department and book stores, autographing copies of my first novel. On the inside of the second finger of my right hand, on the first knuckle, a reddened valley showed from the double-edged sword—the occupational hazard and the long-held dream coming true.

I had the Rent-All truck parked at the curb in front of the dingy brownstone on Boston's Beacon Street where all

the artists-composers-writers-in-residence still came to battle rats and faulty plumbing and pay the landlord once a month at the curb through the rolled-down window of his Continental Mark IV—to give the dream their best, artful shot. I would miss it all, but not so very much.

Two kids from Boston University were transferring my possessions from our flat into the truck for twenty bucks and a six-pack of beer apiece. Most of it was the stuff of which attics are made—rickety rattan-back rockers—a French armoire carved either in the Pyrenees or a basement in Back Bay, whose one foreshortened front leg was made even with the others by a block of plywood—a kitchen cabinet out of some one's nightmare in the 1900's filled with old blue mason jars holding staples and condiments. Lovely junk, everything of uncertain vintage. Early miscellaneous.

Why were they being taken along for the ride to Brighton? I wasn't sure of that. But I knew that when a man began to rip and tear at his past, when he began to exorcise it as though it were a demon of embarrassment or shame, he was tearing at his soul—and a man's soul became diminished soon enough.

As I say, I'd hoped to be on my way across town before Lydia showed up, but timing is usually a thing left to fate and so, when her ancient Jaguar caught the corner of my eye limping grayly into Beacon Street, I simply sighed, chalked one up on Fate's side of the ledger and steeled myself to try and make the best of a touchy situation.

She parked behind the truck, the right front wheel of the Jag up on the sidewalk. When she came out, her slender face was cut in a tragic little smile like a jagged crack in a sidewalk. The pale blue eyes were heavily reddened, as were her cheeks where, likely, tears had been rubbed away with fists.

I let her speak first. It seemed the proper thing to do in the face of such an improper moment.

"Truckin' on, I see." Her tone displayed dull the false good-sportsmanship of the captain of the Boston University basketball team, whose group had just been swamped by 30 at the hands of lowly Rhode Island. Behind that curtain of cordiality lay pure menace and I knew it. "Moving uptown. The big-time condo in Brighton. Doorman, air-conditioning, step-down living room. Hedonist City."

I wasn't going to let this

scene get out of hand. "Lydia, you knew I'd be moving out. We settled all that six months ago. Long before the book."

"Ah, yes—*the book*." There was no mistaking that the words had been inflected in glaring italics. "I would be remiss not to note that it is already being displayed in the bookshops."

"Today was its publication date," I said to her—needlessly, as I saw Lydia's hang-dog eyes once more wince in the face of pain and impending loss.

"The dust jacket photograph on the back is—how shall it be put?—yes, touching. Blown up from an old snapshot as memory recalls. Portrait of the artist in the winter of leaner days. Shabby street shot, sad brownstone backdrop in dirty snowfall, subject shown bundled forlornly in thready wool top-coat, hands jammed into pockets, face set in expression of determination and grim price."

"Lydia!"

"Very cagy promotion, John. The down-and-outer now up and in. Hope for the little people of the world, who will all buy a copy, of course, for future inspiration."

Standing there, across an impassable gulf built on Lydia's glaring indignation, there didn't seem to be any words to soothe her anger. And the boys

had the truck loaded. Both were sitting on the stone steps of the apartment looking anxious to be on the road.

"I left you the prints," I finally said to her, a bit lamely. "The Velasquez and the two Picassos, *Guernica* and *Mother and Child*. You always liked them."

Once more the hard eyes flashed in vengeance restrained. "My bequeathment. Sir, there are no words. No words! You shall now be hunting down the originals, of course."

It was getting sticky and I was becoming stuck in the mire of a bungled parting. "I have to go, Lydia. The rest of my things I'll collect catch-as-catch-can." I handed her a slip of paper with my new address and phone number. "I want us to remain friends. Call or come by any time, Lydia." I meanly watched her crumple the paper in a white fist. She said some words in French, some remembered bits of Balzac which, roughly translated, said, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." She grinned once more at me valiantly, then turned on her heel, got back into the ancient Jaguar, backed it rudely down from the curb and drove off down Beacon. Tears in my throat, I got into the truck.

Moving into the Brighton

Hill Towers was a little like moving up, a little like being set free. A writer never expects a book like *The Common's Killer* to come out of his mind, to become anything more than a low four-figure fluke to pay the rent and the groceries until another throwaway suspense thriller could be churned out.

Lydia, in her twisted, possessive mind, would always believe our arrangement to have been cruel use, a way station for sanctuary and a few hot meals until some kind of toehold was gained in a cold, dispassionate world. The meal-ticket teacher and the impoverished writer. But Lydia began to make noises of ownership. She systematically diminished my female friends while she made me nearly inaccessible to my male friends. She'd read the manual of divide and conquer.

She practiced smothering and surveillance as though they were new Fine Arts. We were never in love, only in like. And like quickly turned to dislike and from there to hate and then a few steps back to pity and compassion. Like a black widow spider, Lydia could never be pleased with her men until their souls were made hers and their flesh devoured. The book had nothing to do with it. I had always been de-

termined to get out while I still had my sanity and my skin.

By seven p.m. that evening, I was all moved in. My few meager pieces of furniture created vast empty spaces in the step-down living room, the raised dining room, the massive bedroom. The pitiable cluster of cardboard boxes in the middle of the living room made the place seem a pauper's warehouse, the shop of a gullible entrepreneur whose stock had been stolen right from under his nose.

In one of the cartons I found the ten-year-old bottle of Pouilly Fuisse that was being saved from some dim and distant success. To this, I applied a dull paring knife for a corkscrew, poured the wine into a highball glass in lieu of fine Danish crystal. I had never been accustomed to treats. In the slums of East St. Louis a treat was reduced to a hot meal on the table every evening and a fistfight where the odds were even and you stood a chance to win.

My father was dead now, his chaotic little delicatessen sold in 1965 when his heart broke down finally from the daily strains of poverty and the probability of strong-arm robbery. My mother now mourned his passing in a near-mindless silence, his and the deaths of two

sons in two near-wars separated by a few thin years of near-peace. Her only living son was off somewhere, in Cleveland or Katmandu, trying to become a writer.

Silently I toasted each of them in their turn for what each had given me, saddened beyond words that what I could now give them had come too late. My treat was savored, swallowed begrudgingly, so few and so very far between had they been.

My telephone was already installed (my agent was hot on the possibility of a movie deal which was supposed to break wide open any moment) and as I pulled things from battered cartons, the phone's presence was a massive unseen thing. I kept telling myself it all wasn't going to happen in a single day in the life of John Sparling. Such a miraculous chain of luck came only to seventh sons and Harold Robbins.

And then, behind me, it rang. I pondered how eager to answer it I should be. Two rings meant unprofessional anxiety and greed—three, unremarkable ordinariness—six or seven, conceit and seeming inaccessibility.

I played the safe ground and chose four rings. And then discovered I'd been playing in a world of fantasy all along. It

was Lydia. She seemed to have thrown off her earlier mood of martyrdom. But *I wasn't* being thrown off. Too many times in the past that voice filled with daisies was simply foilage to hide daggers.

"Have you seen the Theatrical Section of tonight's Boston *Globe* yet?" she said.

"Lydia, I don't even know yet if paper boys will deliver this high above ground-level. Now, spare me the coyness. I'm beat from moving and I want to jump into a hot tub with a cold scotch."

"Well, let me tell you, I think my suspicions are confirmed, love, that you've always been an agent of the C.I.A. posing as a writer."

I tried to keep my rising impatience in check. "Lydia, whenever someone starts running in circles around me, I fall to extreme dizziness."

"Your book. Marc Hartell says in *Bookbeat* that its filming begins in three weeks. In Boston Common, the darker streets of Back Bay, Falmouth, the subways."

That came to me as a genuine shocker. Mentally I kicked my agent in the raw seat of his behind for the delay in telecommunications.

"The article goes on to say," said Lydia now, "that the esteemed Hollywood film editor,

Ms. Caroline Boatwright, and I quote, 'is looking forward eagerly to working with the novel's author, John Sparling, on shock effects and scene locations, in addition to several publicity events in conjunction with the author as additional duties'."

That was news for a cold shower. Why was the author always the last to know? And who in hell was Caroline Boatwright?

"The article goes on to reveal that you will also be doing the screenplay," said Lydia, with just a touch of malice emerging. "And that Ms. Boatwright will be working very closely with you to assure a 'good merging of styles between author, film editor and director.' As well, Ms. Boatwright is scheduled to accompany the author on a nationwide promotional tour to begin in early August when the film is targeted to be completed. My, my, we can keep our little secrets when we have to, can we not?"

To protest to Lydia that I was completely in the dark about all of these recent developments would merely throw fuel on the fire of her paranoia. For three years Lydia had been a revolving psychiatric patient, her persecutions and delusions conveniently ephemeral things no psychiatrist could ever deter-

mine were feigned or real. And so I didn't protest. I said nothing in either direction, but let her go on, because she was rambling now and in no mood for the rebuttal of reality.

"The film will be very Hitchcockian, the article says. How droll! They have you a modern classicist already, even before a frame of film is shot. And I suppose the lovely and estimable Ms. Boatwright is there with you now. I know how the drive of the artist is never at rest."

"There's *no one* here, Lydia," I told her curtly, tired of the long day and of Lydia's dime-novel detective work. "Only me. And my cardboard boxes. And an empty bottle of wine. And a hot bath that's waiting, if I can summon the strength to draw it."

"You see the way the world works, John? You have one economic unit here, one economic unit there. One day these two economic units meet, talk, become tactile, physically, mentally, . . . emotionally—*soulfully*. The burning issues are discussed and the discussion becomes resolved in an agreement to create a new economic unit. Food costs cut to the bone, rent duplication eliminated, loneliness, swept from the picture."

I swallowed a difficult knot of

air. "Lydia, post mortems aren't pleasant for anyone"

"Then, all of a gray and ominous afternoon, one partner to the new economic unit quite suddenly becomes a new economic unit unto himself."

I stayed silent and listened. It would do no good to try to break the cloud of her negative euphoria. I simply wanted to terminate a muddled, harrowing relationship.

"...and your new artist's residence, John! A new economic unit *indeed!* I'd employ the term 'posh' if I could be certain I would not be criticized for understatement. Three indoor pools, private lanai, micro-wave oven, color-coordinated decor—and the ancillary hedonisms—the cabanas, the party rooms, the exercise rooms, the billiard tables, the bevy of wet bars..."

"Lydia!"

"I am impressed, sir, with the trappings of the upward bound. No cracked plaster, no singing plumbing, no Led Zeppelin posters, no corrosive environment. No shabby-cheap early Barbra Streisand funk..."

I was having it up to here. I really was. But, on the other hand, I ran from storms and madness always.

"...and public telephones in the *lobby*. That's where I am now, John. In the lobby of your apartment building. Such a

huge building. And so grossly under-tenanted..."

That gave me a start. It became a chill quickly after that, reaching the length of my spine in a pinnacle of ice. I knew Lydia. I knew the things of which she might be capable. And that knowledge made me nervous.

"...five hundred units and scarcely *fifty* in occupancy, John." There was then a turn to her tone, a shifting, a growing hardness. "I drove over, John. I brought two large grocery bags stuffed with old clothes and rags. I wore my best suit. The beige one, with my ruby pendant. I made up. I looked very downtown. It is very difficult, you understand, to effect entry into a security-locked condominium without employing a little feminine deceit. Were you aware that Dr. Utigaard believes I have all the qualifications to become a Crazy? You know—Fly-off-the-handle, go-beserk, hit-it-off-around-the-bend crazy?"

Uneasily I said, "Scandinavian psychiatrists should be confined to psychoanalyzing lutefisk and some species of cod."

"It's paranoia with complications of possession. I must own things, one of everything in the world. And I must own people. Deprivation as a child has

something to do with it. According to Dr. Utigaard, whose genius is noted as quite superior among his fellow psychoanalysts around the world, I am suffering from a deprivation build-up. Too many denials, John. Too many outstanding debts to my psyche. In other words, accounts payable exceed by a woeful degree accounts received."

"Lydia," I said swiftly, her blow-up so obvious I wanted out of the blast-zone before the megaton tirade exploded in my face, "let's back-off and let some time pass. Breathing room is what's called for here."

"I imagine you're curious about how I got into the building."

"No, Lydia, I am *not*. What I'm *curious about* is whether I'm going to get a bath and any sleep tonight."

"I drove over with two grocery bags filled with old clothes, as I said. I parked on the street and waited for a tenant to show up. Then I hurried up behind her as she let herself into the building. Anyone will hold a door open for you when they see your arms loaded with groceries, and ask no questions. We Americans are such helpful people."

"Lydia, I'm getting off this merry-go-round. While it's still spinning. Because the trip is a

bummer and it's getting me very blue all over. So let's knock it-off."

"Oh, one other thing, John. I bought a pistol. At one of those tacky little pawnshops on Washington Street. You know the type. Those places that are always run by fat little sweating men in yellow shirts and red neckties who, if they're convinced you're not an undercover cop, are perfectly amenable to sell you anything atop or under their counters, no paperwork and no questions asked. As I say, Americans are such helpful people."

Coldly, I asked, "Lydia, what are you doing with a pistol? Your head's in a bind right now, Lydia."

"It's a thirty-eight-caliber, John. And it weighs a bloody ton. I'll have to hold it in both hands to shoot it. The seedy little man showed me how to aim it and squeeze the trigger. And how to put bullets in. I bought bullets, too, John."

"Lydia."

"I'm really crazy now, John. I know it. Dr. Utigaard knows his fruits and nuts, all right. I'm coming upstairs to kill you, John. You are the final deprivation I cannot take. And if I am deprived of you, then I'm going to have to see to it that the rest of the world is deprived of you, too. I'll say goodbye

now, because there won't be time later."

The line went dead in my ear, as though a telephone wire had been snipped off. *God, she was coming upstairs! With that pistol! Coming up to murder me!* That's when I knew Lydia was insane.

Panic did not usually overwhelm or neutralize me, but I could feel its grip squeezing me now. I could see Lydia in my mind's eye—punching the elevator button, waiting for its arrival, getting in, riding up, crying and shaking and cocking that pistol.

Quickly, I broke the connection and dialed Emergency 911. I told a devil-may-care female operator that I was about to be killed and where I was about to be killed and by whom, giving a rapid-fire description of Lydia.

I was transferred to an equally balsé police detective named Stoner or Stoneham who, after being told of Lydia's pistol—and that I wasn't in possession of one to defend myself—perked up and blurted for me to get the hell out of my apartment before Lydia came to blow the door and then me open in that order.

Abruptly, he told me, he didn't know what else to advise, except he would be there in five minutes and that if I could

use my wits and feet to stay alive that long and somehow get out of the building, there was a good chance I would be seeing another dawn.

All I wanted to see at that moment was the hallway outside my unit, with Lydia nowhere in sight. Something told me a timid exit would be worse than a full rush out into the hallway. If Lydia were there, a sudden break-out could disorient her long enough to give me time to escape, rush her, anything. So that's what I did, clad only in stained jeans and wool athletic socks. There was no one in the hallway. So far, so good. So far, still alive and well, and spreeing for my life.

I pounded for the elevators. The building had a bank of three of them, with a lighted panel flashing the movement of elevators, floor-to-floor. One was on its way up to the 24th floor. *Four, five, six, seven...*

Violently I punched a down button. The panel indicated an elevator descending from the 35th floor, the building's top-most. *Thirty-five, thirty-four, thirty-three...* It would be an elevator race. Point was, could I get inside the one descending before Lydia stepped from the one ascending with that pistol in her hand?

Panic does all sorts of things

to people in high stress. Just then I realized that fact. I was not only in panic, I was struck stupid. If Lydia was a latent psychotic, then she possessed the psychotic's peculiar genius, the psychotic's queer powers to calculate, to mask, to scheme. In her madness she was perfectly capable of sending up a phantom elevator and then of waiting for me to come down.

But Lydia might also be incapable of being capable. I flew a look at my wristwatch. Since my phone call to 911, 35 excruciatingly slow seconds had passed. The ascending elevator continued to rise. *Nine, ten, eleven...*

I threw a glance down the hallway, past the elevators, where the main stairwell door seemed to beckon. Whatever Lydia was planning, she was no superhuman sprint star, could not ascend 24 flights of stairs in 35 seconds. The sweat was rolling in sheets from my forehead, coldly lending the feeling that I was already dying. I had to get my legs moving *Now!* In one direction or another. It was always the inert object which became moved, manipulated, acted upon.

I bolted for the staircase door. I spent an endless second before it, feeling like the hero of *The Lady or the Tiger*. She, at least, had had *three* options—I, only

the one. It was a full minute now. *No one* could vault that many floors on foot in the fleet-ing of a minute.

Prepared for my death, I slammed the crossbar and plunged through. There was no one. I could breathe again. And my footfalls would not give me away—not in wool athletic socks.

I tensed and listened for footsteps below, but the deep well of concrete produced only silence. If I could somehow finesse Lydia into firing off all six rounds, she could be rushed while she fumbled with reloading. If I miscounted...

I shoved all that into a corner of my brain, took a new breath and opened the stairwell door a crack. The descending elevator had stopped at a floor above. The rising one had now reached the 24th floor. Its door slid open, but no one came out. After a few seconds at rest, its door slid closed and the elevator began its descent.

The other elevator, the one I might have taken, also stopped at the 24th floor. When its door slipped open, I could hear the voices of two elderly women conversing amicably about grandchildren and a trip to Puerto Rico. The door closed in another moment, sending a second elevator in downward flight.

Slowly, threads of logic were beginning to weave themselves into a discernible pattern in my mind. Lydia was not, for the moment, considering an elevator ride to the 24th floor. And she was not ascending the stairwell. Was she now harbored on some lower floor—the first, the fifth, the ninth, an elevator button depressed there, the pistol trained on all three doors at once as she waited for one to open and show my familiar form?

I let out a deep sigh. I'd identified the possible trap, my Muzak coffin. Now, if I could somehow remain just one scant step ahead of Lydia's psychotic mind... Two minutes had passed. Were the police already in the building? Had Lydia already been apprehended and disarmed? No, the detective had told me five minutes.

I couldn't descend the stairwell. I couldn't take the risk that Lydia might not appear at any floor as I came down. Were that to happen, she would know my path down was blocked. That left only *up*. Up, up, up—constantly up, until only the roof was left, with no ladder in the sky, the pursued painted finally into a vertical corner the pursuer left with the satisfying rewards of pursuit.

I leaned against the concrete wall, mentally exhausted. That

was the cruel beauty in Lydia's scheme. She was stalking a thinking man, an intelligent man, one whose actions depended on laws of logic and probability—a man now trapped on the very floor on which he lived, trapped by his own reasonable mind!

No clear solutions sprang up in my brain. Because there *were no solutions*. Lydia, in her insane brilliance, knew that as well. Thirty more seconds had crawled into the past. She knew I would call the police and so knew, as well, that she must soon come after me.

Did time become a fractured, unreadable element to a psychotic? Might some absence of presence of mind intervene to save me? The pressure of being trapped was beginning to eat at my own presence of mind, my own sanity. I was on the ragged edge and I could feel it. She was, of course, coming after me—and at this very minute.

The perfect refuge had, of course, been there all along; behind my blind panic it had remained obscured until this moment. But I was on the verge of dying—perhaps the mind worked overtime in the grim face of that event.

Quickly I scrambled up two flights of stairs to the 26th-floor, a slight gesture that might throw Lydia off just

enough to give me the foolproof sanctuary I needed.

At the 26th, I pushed carefully through the stairwell door and sneaked a look out into the hall. No one. I walked swiftly to the elevators, slammed a palm against the Down button, then raced back to the safety of the stairwell door. The odds were good that Lydia might not be an upward occupant. But I would only take a *descending* elevator. In this crazy cat-and-mouse game, I had to stay with logic and probability.

I had a good view of the floor panel from the stairwell door. I let rising elevators arrive and depart, until the fifth, which descended from an upper floor. I let it settle, let its door slide open. Then, gathering what little courage was left in me, I sprinted for it in time to leap past a closing door. I let the elevator descend four floors.

Then I curled an index finger around the red Emergency Stop switch and brought it down. With a little shake and shudder, the unit stuttered to a halt. The whine of its engine ceased. I was inside a soundless vault. No one could get in, not until I put the unit back into operation by my own hand. I was safe.

I sank to a sitting position on the floor at the rear of the car. I wished I'd brought cigarettes or a book. Or a wristwatch. But I

was perfectly willing to remain there an hour, two three, all night, until the oxygen began to give out or until the police finally located me. Time was not on Lydia's side now. It was on mine.

How much time passed, only the outside world would know. A half-hour, an hour, a night-time. Does the caved guru wear a Timex, or even have the slightest notion or care of the time of day? I was enshrined. I had a sanctuary. Time could blow itself up into its million shards of minutes and seconds and instants, for all I cared.

Eventually, my stalled elevator was found. I woke from a serene little nap to hear a heavy object being banged on the door and a voice identifying itself as Patrolman Jessup, of the Boston Police Department. A pistol's butt. Mother's milk, a father's reassuring pat, a close friend's handshake. Groggily I rose, flicked the red button which caused the door to open and stepped out.

Officers, Patrolman Jessup told me, were all over the building. Combing it up and down and all around. Lydia hadn't yet been found, but no one was going to walk away from an attempted homicide. I took Patrolman Jessup down to my apartment and gave him a recent photograph of Lydia. He

would show it in turn to all of the officers in the building.

If Lydia were loose and still stalking me, there was no chance of her getting out of the building without apprehension. There would be an officer stationed outside my apartment door until the entire building had been thoroughly gone over, which meant every vacant unit, every service and recreational room, every nook and cranny.

Back inside my new home, relaxation and security returned to me slowly, entwined with guilt and sadness and a thin feeling of victory. Of course a raving psychotic like Lydia was no match for a sane man and the entire uniformed force of the Boston Municipal Police Department! Was Lydia, in her madness, incapable of such a simple understanding? Sadly and pitifully, she was.

It was nearly 10 p.m. now. I made my belated Scotch, drew my bath. I sank into its steaming heat, drank my Scotch absorbed warm water through the pores of my skin. Lydia had to be helped, of course. I would see to it, no matter what the expense.

My sudden new status and wealth had diminished her to an aspect that seemed smaller than what love I had been able to give her. A beaten, embittered, helpless creature—a

statistical write-off, written off by me. Yes, I would help her—whatever the cost. I owed her that.

I dried myself in lazy pats, took a second Scotch and turned down the bed covers. Weeks of hard work lay ahead of me with the promotion of *The Common's Killer*, and still harder weeks on its screen adaptation. I had to put Lydia behind me now. She was a patient, a former lover and, for better or worse, an ongoing friend. I would lend her a patient's gentleness, a lover's sympathy, a friend's help. I could do no more for her than that.

Just as I was taking the last drams of my final Scotch and considering the tranquil beauty and peace of my downturned bed, the phone rang again. The police. Lydia had been captured, subdued in her madness, led off quietly to jail in kind, understanding hands. I walked back into the livingroom, determined to make known my desire that she be given every consideration, be administered by every available source, public or private, which could be brought to her aid.

"Hello?"

"John, darling? It's me. It's Lydia."

The receiver slipped from my hand but I caught it in time.

"Lydia, what in the devil—"

"Did you have a harrowing experience, sweetcakes?" came the voice, all of its earlier menace intact and in perverse control. "My, how you must have had, to create a dynamic defense against me—and my pistol."

"Where are you, Lydia?"

"Where *am* I? Why, I'm home, luv. AT OUR PLACE ON Beacon'. You know how dangerous the streets of cities are at night. To venture out without escort, even driving, is the act of a foolish woman. And I'm not a foolish woman, John. Only an insane one."

"You're right in your growing suspicions. I was never *at* your apartment tonight. You have creative genius—I have creative genius. Yes, John. I did it all by telephone, nine miles away. It was a game, John, an experiment in terror. Are the police there now? I'm sure you have them all over the building, racing around like Keystone Kops, looking for a little woman who isn't there."

"Lydia, I want to help you—I truly do. Can't you see that?"

The laughter that came through the line was not the laughter of a woman who needed help. "John, John! My dear, rich and soon-to-be-famous author! Can't you see that it's *you* who will be need-

ing help? The next time I play the game? Or the time after that? Or the time after *that*?"

"You see, dear, lost lover, you will never know *when* the game ceases to become a game and becomes real. Now I must hang up. Goodnight, dear John."

I held the handset in my palm for a time longer than reflection required.

The chime of the doorbell broke the dark thread. Even though I knew it couldn't be Lydia, it took all of my courage to cross the living room to answer it. Patrolman Jessup stood there. He said, "She's not here. We've scoured the building."

I said, "I know. She just called. It was all a hoax."

"*Some hoax!*" he said. "Some lousy hoax! Listen, Mister, the next time she tries it, give the taxpayers a break and don't call us."

I went to bed—but not to sleep. I wondered if Lydia in her maniacal intelligence had foreseen the police reaction. Probably, I decided. But what difference did it make?

It had been a day in my life like no other that had gone before—but there would be others like it. Lydia had promised to see that, and Lydia was a woman who kept her word. I wondered how many more there would be before she decided to put an end to the game. . . .

The Savonarola Syndrome



by JAMES HOLDING

The hottest books in town, that's what the good doctor collected. Sensuous, sexy—and every one stolen. For Hal Johnson, library cop, the case looked explosively simple—until it blew up!

MONDAY NOON, when I got back to my office at the library, there was a note on my desk. "I'd like to see you when you have a minute," it said. It was signed "Ellen."

Anytime Ellen wants to see me, I have a minute. She's the girl on the check-out desk at the library. She has a face like a Botticelli angel and a figure like an Egyptian belly-dancer.

I didn't even sit down at my desk. I went down the corridor to the main library room, turned in through the double doors, and walked over to Ellen's desk with

what is sometimes referred to as a spring in my stride.

I waited until Ellen had checked out a dozen books for a lantern-jawed, grizzled old man whose taste, judging from his book titles, seemed to run to the care and feeding of tropical plants. Then I stepped up to her desk and said, "Don't tell me, Ellen. Let me guess. You've decided to marry me."

She smiled and shook her head. "Don't nag me, Hal," she said. "I'm still thinking it over."

"You've been thinking it over



for four months and eight days now," I answered. Which was true. "And I've only asked for an answer six times. Or is it seven? Do you call that nagging?"

"Borderline case, I'd say. Any-
way, that isn't what I wanted to
see you about. This is a profes-
sional matter."

Professional. That seemed an odd word to apply to my job. I'm the guy who chases down stolen and overdue books for the public library. Library fuzz. A kind of sissy cop. It's not exciting work, usually, but it's steady. And I suppose you *could* call it a profession of sorts. It pays a fair salary

anyway—enough to marry Ellen on if she'd ever make up her mind to say "yes".

I said, "What is this professional matter that concerns you?"

"What it is," Ellen said, "is that there's something funny going on around here."

"Tell your favorite detective all about it," I said.

"Somebody's stealing books from my current fiction rack."

"What gives you that idea?" I asked.

"Well, a lot of people keep coming in and asking for *The Cult of Venus*, and complaining to me because they can't ever find a copy of it on the shelves. It's that novel by Joel Carstairs..."

"Whee!" I interrupted her. "That *Cult of Venus* book is a very warm item, baby. Have you read it?"

She flushed. "What difference does that make? Until this morning, I've just taken it for granted that all our copies of the book are out, and that's why there aren't any on the shelves recently. It's a very popular book, of course, a best seller."

"Bound to be," I teased her, "what with all decency thrown to the winds, explicit scenes of wild sexual abandon every other page and..."

"Be serious, Hal! I'm trying to tell you that this morning, after three more requests for the book,

I decided to check our records on it."

"How many copies are we circulating?"

"Sixteen. Eight here and two each for our branches." She brushed her hair back from her cheek. "That's when I found something funny. When I checked the cards. Our records show that seven copies should be on the shelves. But they aren't. And they haven't been misfiled, either. I checked that. They've just disappeared, Hal. Don't you think that's funny?"

"Sure," I said. "Hilarious. Seven out of eight? That's a lot of copies for anyone to want of the same book. Even a dirty one."

"It's not really dirty so much," Ellen said primly, "as frank and realistic."

"Dirty," I said. "I read it." I thought for a moment. An acne-splotched teenager approached Ellen's desk with an armload of books. I said, "Here comes a customer, Ellen. I'll see what I can figure and see you later."

I went back to my cubby-hole behind the office of the library's business manager, sat down at my desk, pulled over my telephone and made four quick calls to our branch libraries. In each case, I asked the librarian to check on the two copies of *The Cult of Venus* her branch was circulating, and get back to me as soon as possible.

Twenty minutes later I had reports from all four branches. Of the eight copies of *The Cult of Venus* assigned to the branches, only three were accounted for as out on loan. The other five had been returned by borrowers and should have been on the current fiction shelves waiting to go out again. But they weren't. They had disappeared without the slightest trace.

Digesting that little nugget of information, I stood up and prowled around my closet-sized office for a couple of minutes before walking down the hall to visit Ellen again.

"Listen," I said to her when she was free for a minute, "is that the dirtiest book we're circulating right now? *The Cult of Venus*?"

She said, "Well, that's fairly outspoken all right, Hal, but . . ."

"We've got dirtier ones?"

She hesitated. "For my money, *The Parallel Triangle* is about as dirty as you can get—to use your word."

"You read that one, too?"

"Just skimmed it. Part of my job." She made a *moue* of distaste.

"Then check out our copies of *The Parallel Triangle* for me, will you, Ellen? When you get a few minutes free?"

She looked at me with raised eyebrows. "You think we've got some nutty thief here who loves dirty books?" she asked. "Somebody who's so enthusiastic that

he collects all the copies he can get?"

"It's a possibility. Let me know what you find out, anyway. And you might take a look at your records on a few other dirty books, too, while you're at it. Even any you think are only frank and realistic."

Ellen sighed. "Okay, Hal."

I descended into the basement and grabbed a quick bite at the library cafeteria before setting out on my afternoon round of calls for overdue books and fines. When I returned to the library again at 5:30, Ellen had left for the day but there was another note on my desk. This one read:

The Parallel Triangle: Of our twelve copies, seven are missing. *Harrigan's Bag* (also very frank and realistic!): four of our eight are missing. How about that, Sherlock?

How about it, indeed?

II

NEXT MORNING, I checked our branches on their copies of *The Parallel Triangle* and *Harrigan's Bag*. More than half of the branch library copies were missing. They'd disappeared without a trace. As Ellen had said, something very funny seemed to be going on.

In my six years at the public library, I've had plenty of experi-

ence with book thieves. They come in all shapes and sizes. People who steal library books for the few dollars they'll bring from unscrupulous second-hand book dealers. Poor people who steal library books because they truly love books, feel compelled to own them, and can't afford to buy them. People who steal books just for the hell of it—sometimes to satisfy the urgings of deep-buried kleptomania, sometimes for no reason at all except the thrill of stealing.

Then there are the otherwise respectable book collectors who steal out-of-print, rare, hard-to-get books and special editions from the public library just to round out their collections.

And of course, there's a small but select group of secret pornography-lovers who steal salacious books from the library because they're ashamed to be seen openly buying or borrowing them.

Our current thief seemed to fit nicely into the latter category, judging by the type of books he was stealing. Yet if so, why would he want so many copies of each book? Even the most enthusiastic porno buff could only read one book at a time.

No, I decided, the thief I was after wasn't a secret lover of pornography. He had to be a market-wise practical thief who was conforming smartly to the

law of supply and demand, interested only in the commercial benefits of his thievery.

For while our dirty books remained on the best seller lists, it figured that public demand for them would expand constantly. Therefore the second-hand dealers could resell as many copies of these particular titles as they could lay their hands on. And quite probably, they'd pay our thief a considerably higher price for his stolen goods than ordinary books would bring.

Well, good for you, Johnson, I told myself. You've figured out why the books are being stolen. So now figure out who is stealing them and how to get them back. That's what the library is paying you for, after all. Those books go for anywhere up to eight ninety-five retail, and that adds up to a lot of scarce library dough. So what are you going to do about it?

Simple, I answered myself. I'll set a little trap for the rascal.

I requested that all our remaining copies of *The Parallel Triangle* be withdrawn from circulation when they were returned by borrowers, and sent to me at the main library. As the lewdest and most popular book of the lot, that title would make the best bait, I figured.

When I had a reasonable backlog of copies, I would feed one copy at a time onto the current fiction rack at the main li-

brary and sit nearby, personally, and watch what happened to it. If a legitimate borrower selected the book and checked it out at Ellen's desk in the regular way, I would put another copy on the rack and watch *that*. If anybody smuggled *The Parallel Triangle* out of the library without checking it out at Ellen's desk, I figured the chances would be good that I'd caught our thief in the act.

By Thursday morning enough copies of the book had come in to my office to provide continuing bait for a couple of days, I hoped—at least during the heavy traffic hours in the library when the thief might be expected to operate.

It might take weeks to land him, I realized. On the other hand, I could get lucky in an hour. With no copies of the book available now at any of our branches, the thief would be forced to patronize the main library if he wanted to snag any more copies of *The Parallel Triangle*.

I decided to start the action. Not that I expected much action in the true sense of the word. I foresaw weary hours of sitting on a hard chair in a distant corner of the reading room, watching my bait in the fiction rack. Yet it was a welcome relief from collecting overdue books and fines.

So about eleven o'clock Thurs-



day morning, I salted the rack with one copy of *The Parallel Triangle* and took up my vigil. It was really quite pleasant, I discovered, because I could see Ellen's desk, and Ellen herself, from my spy-chair. And I didn't know of any better way to rest tired eyes than to look at Ellen.

As it turned out, the third customer who picked *The Parallel Triangle* from the rack was my man. Out of the busy noon-hour crowd of library habitués who were browsing through the stacks, scanning the card catalog files, lining up before the check-out and check-in desks, he suddenly appeared at quarter after twelve, sidling up to the current fiction shelf so casually as to make it seem almost accidental.

Yet there was nothing accidental in the swiftness with which he plucked *The Parallel Triangle*,

along with its nearest neighbor, from the rack, after only half-a-second's inspection of the shelf's contents.

With a nod of satisfaction he came at a brisk, decisive pace toward the reading room, where I was pretending to peruse a month-old issue of *National Geographic*.

As he passed me, I got a good look at him over my magazine. He was medium tall, strongly built, stooped a little with age but not much. His abundant shock of carefully-combed hair was pure white. He wore rimless eyeglasses. Deep-graven lines bracketed his thin-lipped mouth. And the reddish brown eyes, under brows which still retained some of the brown his hair coloring lost, held a curious half-desperate, half-resigned expression.

Altogether he was quite distinguished-looking. I couldn't easily imagine anyone looking less like a petty book thief. Yet there he was, two library books from the current fiction shelf in one hand, a black leather briefcase in the other. The leather briefcase looked expensive. So did the bluechecked slacks and navy blazer he was wearing.

He sat down in a vacant chair at one of the long reading-room tables and placed his briefcase on the table in front of him. Then he made a quiet business of reading

the jacket-blurbs of *The Parallel Triangle* and leafing through it as though making up his mind whether he wanted to read it or not.

After five minutes of this, he raised his eyes without lifting his head, checked the other occupants of the reading room to make sure we were all absorbed in our books or magazines, then quietly lifted the lid of his briefcase three inches and slid *The Parallel Triangle* inside.

It was done as skillfully as a prestidigitator palms a card. One second, *The Parallel Triangle* was there, resting on top of his briefcase; the next, it had disappeared, and the white-haired gentleman was examining the second library book he had selected from the rack.

At length he rose from his chair, took his briefcase from the table, walked briskly into the main room and returned the second book to the fiction rack as though he had decided not to borrow it after all. He glanced briefly at Ellen's check-out desk and saw that her attention was fully occupied by the half dozen people waiting in line at her desk. Immediately he swung about and walked confidently out the rear door of the main library room which led down a short corridor to our Technology Department. The Technology Department has an entrance of its own

from the street bordering the rear of the library.

I tossed aside my *National Geographic* and went right after him.

III

HE DISAPPEARED down one of the narrow passages in the Technology Department between the ceiling-high shelves of books. I let him go and made for the librarian on the desk. She was a friend of Ellen's, and quite bored enough to exchange idle chat with anybody who came along—even me. Her name is Laura.

Laura and I had covered Laura's health, mine, Ellen's, the Oscar Awards on TV last week, and were just getting to the prospects for our local baseball club when my distinguished-looking thief, swinging his briefcase jauntily, appeared from the maze of bookshelves.

He cast a pleasant nod in our direction as he passed us before sauntering nonchalantly out the rear door of the library to the sidewalk.

I said, "You know that old bird, Laura?"

She nodded. "He's a steady customer. Comes here several times a week. He's a dear."

"Interested in science and technology, is he?"

"Of course. He's retired now, but he used to be a professor of

electrical engineering at the University."

"Well, well," I said. I decided it wouldn't be necessary to follow him any farther right now. "What's his name, do you know?"

"Dr. Amos Satchell. Doctor as in P.H.D., not medicine."

"And why does he come to your Technology Department so often if he's retired?"

"He's still writing books," Laura said, "He has a lot of research to do for them naturally."

"I see," I said. But I didn't.

"Textbooks," Laura went on. "We have two or three of them here in the library as a matter of fact." She squinted at me. "Why are you so curious about Dr. Satchell, Hal?"

I was tempted to answer her by advising her to check her shelves to see how many technical works on sexual subjects were missing, but decided against it. Instead I said, "Just curious," and left her, returning to my own office.

There wasn't any great rush, now. I knew the identity of the thief, and I could get his address from his library card if he had one, or from the telephone book, for that matter. And I wanted to think about Dr. Amos Satchell for a bit before I braced him.

So it wasn't until the next morning that I drove my old Chevy out City Line toward the University and pulled up in front of a small but neatly-kept frame

house, standing modestly well back from the street in a large lot, shielded from its nearest neighbors by high hedges. The Professor liked his privacy, apparently.

I left the Chevy parked in the street before Professor Satchell's house and walked up the long path of stepping stones, parallel to his gravel driveway, that led to his front door. I pressed the doorbell. Faintly I could hear musical chimes inside, announcing my arrival.

I was earnestly hoping the Professor himself would be at home and that I wouldn't have to deal with a loyal wife or daughter or son. For it's not my idea of fun to inform a nice woman that her husband or father is a dirty-minded old man who steals sexy books from the public library. If you know what I mean.

I needn't have worried. Dr. Amos Satchell himself opened the door to me, his thick white hair as smooth and neatly kept as his lawn and shrubbery outside. I felt suddenly unsure of myself. This venerable, respectable-looking, retired scientist *couldn't* be a book thief. I'd made a mistake somewhere. To cover my embarrassment I said, "Are you Dr. Amos Satchell?" I almost added a "sir". He was that kind of a guy.

He smiled cordially and nodded. "What can I do for you?"

I cleared my throat. "May I talk with you for a few minutes, Dr. Satchell? Alone?" I was still thinking about the possibility of a loving wife hovering around.

"Of course," he said easily. He stepped back and held the door open, inviting me in. I thought that was a trifle odd, asking a stranger to come in, until I remembered that he'd probably noticed me talking to Laura, the librarian, yesterday.

Just for the record, though, I got out my identification card and showed it to him. "I'm from the public library," I said. He peered at my ID through his rimless bifocals.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Johnson, is it? Come in, won't you?"

He led me through a center hall, richly carpeted, and into a small den, booklined and cozy. I looked for copies of our stolen books among his volumes, but failed to locate any. He waved me to an easy chair and sat down himself behind a beautifully made desk of dark satiny wood. "I've rather been expecting you, Mr. Johnson," he said, "since yesterday afternoon." So he *had* recognized me.

I didn't say anything for a second or two. At that moment I was disliking my job intensely; I was reluctant to harry this harmless old fellow. At length I murmured, "I'm afraid I've come on a rather unpleasant errand, Dr. Satchell."

He went right on smiling. "It's about the books I've stolen from your library, isn't it?"

I swallowed. "That's right. You've...ah...appropriated quite a few of them, haven't you?"

He seemed to be making a mental calculation. "A good many, it's true. But only a few titles." No apology in his voice, no shame, no guilt, just a quiet statement of fact.

"*The Cult of Venus*," I said, "*The Parallel Triangle*, *Harri-gan's Bag*."

Gravely he nodded his white-maned head. "Those are the ones, yes."

"Why did you confine yourself to those three titles? And why steal so many copies of each?"

"Because those three books are the latest and most blatant examples of the filth that is being foisted on us in the name of literature today!"

Satchell wasn't smiling now. His voice was sharp and high with angry passion. "I consider it immoral and disgraceful that a great public institution like the library should pander to the lowest tastes, should offer a free reading of lewd and obscene books to the citizens of this city!"

So. A crusader. That's what Dr. Satchell was. I remembered Ellen's guess that our thief might be a nut who loved dirty books. He wasn't, obviously. He was a nut who *hated* dirty books. I said,

"What good did you think you could do by stealing those few books from the library?"

"I hoped I could get them all, Mr. Johnson, before I was apprehended. Get at least those three disgusting books off the shelves where teenagers and yes, even children, are exposed to their insidious corrupting influence! I stole them as a protest, I suppose. Against the careless, pernicious, permissive book selections made by our Library Board. In the hope that future selections might be more seemly and decent than those abominations I have stolen!"

Quite a speech. Dr. Satchell sank back in his chair. I said, as soothingly as I could, "You're absolutely right, Dr. Satchell. Some of the material our writers are turning out today is garbage of the worst kind. But surely you couldn't have hoped to do much to turn the tide of what you call 'filth' by stealing only a few books from the public library?"

He ran a thin hand across his forehead, puzzled and distraught. "I don't know," he said vaguely. "I don't know. Perhaps I was foolish to think I could accomplish anything in such a fashion. I...I realize that now...."

I interrupted him. "In that case," I said, "maybe we can make a deal, sir." I was feeling very sorry for the troubled old gentleman. And my own sym-

pathies, I must admit, leaned toward his view of current fiction. "The library has no desire to be unduly harsh about your book-stealing, Dr. Satchell. To a certain extent, we can understand and sympathize with your views.

I took a list from my pocket and held it out to him. He made no move to take it. "As nearly as we can figure it, these are the books you've stolen from us. If you're willing to return them now, and pay a fine of ten cents per day per book for the period you've kept them, I think we can arrange to settle the matter without recourse to the police." I was struck by a sudden thought. "You haven't destroyed the books, have you?"

Dr. Satchell shook his head. "Oh, no. Not yet. I intended to gather them all together and burn them publicly in Woodhouse Square, as Savonarola did in Florence long ago. But I fully realize now that that would be an exercise in futility."

"Good," I said. "Then you'll return the books and pay the fine?"

He sighed. "Rather than go to prison, yes, of course. I need my freedom to carry on the work, Mr. Johnson. I do not admit defeat, you understand. I merely realize that sterner measures will be required to dam the flow of prurient material you peddle to the public."

He stood up and turned toward a door in the corner of the den. "Your library books are here," he said. "I've kept them in my closet, out of sight. You can understand why."

I nodded and crossed the room to join him as he opened the closet door. "There they are, on the floor, Mr. Johnson."

It was dark in the closet. I stepped past him and stooped in the doorway, reaching out my hands for the books, and feeling a wave of relief that we wouldn't have to get tough, after all, with poor old Dr. Satchell, since he had turned out to be merely a pathetic crank and not a real criminal at all.

Poor old pathetic Dr. Satchell. I don't know what he hit me with. Later I figured it might have been a heavy onyx ashtray I'd noticed on his desk. But hit me he did—a good solid belt on the back of the head that tumbled me into the closet like a sack of wet sand and made me see a variety of fireworks before I blacked all the way out.

IV

THE BLACKOUT was only temporary, although when I opened my eyes I couldn't see anything but blackness around me. Which meant that the closet door had been shut. And I knew I'd been out for only a few seconds because I heard the click of the key in the

closet lock as Dr. Satchell turned it from outside.

Sounds reached me through the closet door, and my own returning senses told me what they were. Desk drawers being opened and closed in the den. Thumps as Dr. Satchell placed something on the desk or floor. The pad of footsteps then, leaving the room and returning after an interval. Then a repetition of the retreating and returning footsteps. I counted three such brief journeys out there before it occurred to me in my addled state to take any action myself.

I yelled through the door, "Hey, Dr. Satchell! Are you nuts?" Not a brilliant question to ask of a man who obviously *was* nuts. I wasn't tracking too well yet: Besides I was suffering from a kingsized case of chagrin at allowing myself to have been conned by the likes of Dr. Satchell.

Dr. Satchell didn't answer me, though the sounds of movement outside my door continued.

After several attempts, I stood upright in the dark closet and felt groggily around me with my hands and feet. My feet told me that there were no library books stacked on the floor of the closet as Satchell had claimed. And my searching hands told me that the rest of the closet was quite empty, too, except for Hal Johnson, the demon detective. There wasn't



even a doorknob on my side of the door. And the door wouldn't budge, even when I leaned my weight against it.

I cleared my throat and belowed, "Dr. Satchell?"

This time he answered me. "Yes, Mr. Johnson?" Deceptively mild.

"This is going to cost you a hell of a lot more than a fine! What's the idea of slugging me?"

"I told you I had decided on sterner measures."

"Knocking me on the head and locking me in a closet is what you call sterner measures?"

"No, no. Merely a necessary precaution. It is essential that I keep you...ah...safely incomunicado while I proceed."

"With what?"

"Sterner measures, Mr. Johnson. Aren't you listening?"

I felt a small bead of ice slide down my backbone. "What sterner measures?"

"They need not concern you." He kept silent for a moment. Then, "I *will* tell you one thing, however, Mr. Johnson. I intend to return your filthy books to the library at once. In fact, that is where I am going right this moment."

Did that explain his three salutes out of the den? To carry the stolen library books out to his car preparatory to returning them to the library? I could hear faint movement through the door before his voice came again. It was high, again, and thready with excitement. "Well, goodby, Mr. Johnson."

"Wait!" I yelled. "How about me? When will you let me out of here?"

"In exactly fifteen minutes," said Dr. Satchell. "You must try to be patient until then." And surprisingly, he laughed. A low snickering kind of laugh that chilled me, somehow.

And another bead of ice slowly slid down my spine. Because it suddenly occurred to me that if he was driving to the library or any of its branches to return the stolen books as advertised, he couldn't possibly be back home again in fifteen minutes to release me from the closet. Not even if he used a helicopter. And that funny laugh...

I decided not to be patient for fifteen minutes as advised. I decided I had to get out of that closet now. I shouted assorted threats and cajolery through the door at Satchell for several precious minutes without result. Then I shut up and listened. I heard a car start up at the rear of the house and scatter driveway gravel as it rolled out to the street. Satchell had departed. I attacked the closet door.

Maybe it was a thin door with an old rusty lock; maybe anger lent me extra strength; and maybe I was just scared stiff-legged. Whatever it was, my first kick at the door, in the region where the lock should be, split the wooden panel from top to bottom, ripped the lock tongue loose from the splintered door jamb, and catapulted me feet first into the den, where I brought up against Satchell's satinwood desk edge with a rib-shaking jar.

I paused an instant to rub my bruises and catch my breath before launching myself in eager pursuit of Dr. Amos Satchell. And that instant was long enough for me to take startled note of a curious object on Satchell's desk.

In the circumstances it seemed very curious to me. For there, lying beside the onyx ashtray Satchell must have used on my head, was a bright-jacketed copy of that dirty book to end all dirty

books—*The Parallel Triangle*. I was sure it hadn't been there before I entered the closet.

It was one of the library's stolen copies. The library's identification was plainly discernible on cover and spine. Yet for a frozen moment, the significance of its presence there on Satchell's desk-top eluded me. I reached out automatically to pick it up. Then, as though arrested in midair by an invisible barrier, my reaching hand stopped dead. And I knew with sickening certainty what Dr. Satchell had meant when he spoke of 'sterner measures'.

The Parallel Triangle was ticking.

Fifteen minutes, Satchell had said. I'll let you out in fifteen minutes, Mr. Johnson. Oh yes, he'd let me out all right. By blowing his damned house down around my ears and killing me in the process. Very simple.

How many minutes were left of the promised fifteen? Not many, certainly. I'd dawdled for a good while in the closet before kicking my way out. And I'd dawdled away more precious time right here by this desk.

Besides, what if Satchell had been lying about the fifteen minute leeway? He'd lied about everything else, so why not? Maybe *The Parallel Triangle* would blow sky-high if I so much as touched it. Maybe Satchell had *counted* on my getting out of his rickety

closet and seizing the book.

I shuddered. I tried hard to keep myself from panicking. For I can admit without shame that I've always been a practicing coward when it comes to explosives of any kind. And I'm all thumbs when it comes to anything electrical. So I didn't even consider trying to disarm Satchell's book-bomb. After all, he was an expert, an exprofessor of electrical engineering or something of the sort. I wasn't about to mess with his ticking bomb.

But I had to do something. A terrifying picture flashed into my mind and stayed there—a picture of Ellen Crosby, my possible future bride, being blown into gory bits when Dr. Amos Satchell returned his stolen books to the library. He wouldn't return them, of course, to the proper check-in desk; no, in all probability, if he returned them at all, he'd slip them quietly onto secluded library shelves where no one would hear them ticking until far too late to avert disaster.

He wouldn't overlook the branch libraries, either, I was pretty sure. After all, he had a whole car load of book-bombs to work with if he'd gimmicked every copy he'd stolen of those three novels.

So not only my Ellen, but all our librarians, our entire staff, and a lot of innocent men, women and children who would happen

to be in the building when the books exploded, were probably in deadly danger, too.

The Parallel Triangle went on ticking merrily away, preventing me from thinking in my usual cool, logical, brilliant fashion. All I could think of to do at that moment was to grab the telephone sitting jauntily beside the book-bomb on Satchell's desk-top, and dial the police emergency number with a trembling forefinger, and pray a lot. I had Lieutenant Randall, my old boss at the Detective Bureau, on the line in thirty seconds. It seemed like thirty minutes with that ticking in my ears.

Randall said, "Yeah?" in his bland, bored voice.

"This is Hal Johnson," I said rapidly, "and I have only a minute or so to live, so don't interrupt me, for God's sake!" I jerked out my story to him in the fastest briefing anyone ever got, and when he snapped, "Okay, Hal, I got it," I hung up the receiver very, very delicately to avoid jarring the ticking book nearby, and then took to my heels as though all the devils in hell were after me.

V

I MADE a new sprint record getting through the front door of Satchell's house and down that long long path of stepping stones

to the street where my car still stood at the curb. I jumped in, fired up the engine, made a U-turn and started south on City Line Avenue, heading for the main library.

It was not only closer to Satchell's house than any of the branch libraries, but I was confident he'd want to blow it up first anyway, it being, you might say, the main offender in purveying dirty books to the public. I hadn't covered half a block when I heard above the sound of my racing motor a kind of dull thumping boom behind me.

It took me twelve minutes to get downtown, even at my illegal rate of speed.

I screeched to a stop beside an unmarked car parked in the no-parking zone directly in front of the main library's entrance. I could see Lieutenant Randall sitting behind the wheel of this unmarked car, talking into a hand mike. I got out of my car, ran around behind it and stuck my head in the open window of Randall's command car and said, "Well?"

I must have looked and sounded somewhat tense because Randall switched off and grinned at me. "Calm down, Junior, everything's under control." He glanced complacently at the library. "We made it in nine minutes flat. That's not bad for a police department that gets more

criticism than the President, is it?"

"Has Satchell showed yet?" I stuttered.

"Not yet. Not a sign of him. I've got a man stationed at the entrance of every branch library, just like you wanted. With instructions to hold any white-haired cat in rimless glasses carrying a briefcase or a copy of any of those dirty books you mentioned. Also, I've got a man at every entrance to the main library here with ditto instructions. And I've got another man in a squad car within sight of each door guard to call it in when your nut shows, so I'll know it quick. Relax. Wherever he goes, we've got him."

He looked at me narrowly. "You sure you're not just imagining all this? I notice you weren't blown up in the nut's house, after all."

"The bomb blew a minute after I left, Lieutenant. I heard it." I asked anxiously, "Couldn't you get the libraries evacuated?" I was still picturing Ellen in little pieces.

"Not enough time, Hal. We passed a goddam miracle to do what we've done! Besides, if your crazy friend shows up and finds a bomb scare going on, he's going to back off and come back with his bombs some other day when we're not ready for him. This way, we nail him now." He looked at his watch again. "He hasn't

shown up yet, Hal. I'm sure of it."

"But he left his house more than twenty minutes ago! He could have got inside before your men were deployed."

"No way. How long did it take you drive here from his house?"

"About twelve minutes."

"See? Satchell wouldn't have made it in less than twenty. He'd drive slow and careful with a car-load of bombs, right? And he'd drive by way of the quiet Park instead of by that traffic madhouse, City Line Avenue. Right?" I nodded doubtfully. "And he'll have to find a place to park, which is a fifteen minute project around any library unless you're lucky. Right? So relax. We've got him, I tell you."

I was only half-convinced. "How about the bomb expert?"

Lieutenant Randall jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "Back there," he said. "Sergeant Kwalik, bomb squad."

I hadn't even noticed the cop in the back seat. I said, "Hi, Sergeant," and looked up the broad flight of steps to the main entrance of the library. A plainclothes detective named Corrigan was standing beside the door up there, keeping a sharp eye out—I hoped—for white-haired men with rimless glasses, briefcases and dirty books.

I had a sudden hunch. I said to Randall, "Listen, when this nut stole a book from this library yes-

terday, he left the library through the Technology Department exit on the back street. Maybe he'll go in that way now."

"I've got a man there, I told you. *Every* entrance. Shut up and let me listen to this." A subdued muttering came over the police band on his radio. "He hasn't shown up anywhere yet," he reported then.

I was too antsy to stay there doing nothing. I said, "I'm going around back and check that Technology entrance. Okay?"

Randall was talking into his mike again. He nodded to me. I ran up the front steps of the library, tipped a hand in greeting to Corrigan as I went through the door, then walked at a more sedate pace through the main library room past Ellen's desk, giving her a big smile as I passed. She returned the smile, not suspecting a thing.

I was enormously relieved to see her once again all in one beautiful piece, even if it might be the last time. I gave the library and reading room a hurried scrutiny as I sailed through them. No sign of Satchell. I was tempted to stop and look in the stacks, but my hunch was still driving me.

I went down the corridor to the Technology Department on the run. I didn't waste time casing the narrow aisles between bookshelves there, either, but went

straight to Laura on the desk. I asked her as casually as I could whether her retired professor friend, Dr. Amos Satchell, had been in today. She said no, looking puzzled.

Without stopping to allay her curiosity, I stepped through the rear door by which Satchell had exited yesterday, and found Pete Calloway, an old friend from my days with the police department, standing guard outside.

I said, "Hi, Pete. Any action yet?"

"Nothing," said Pete.

"Nobody came in this way since you've been here?"

"One guy is all. No white hair, though. No briefcase. No rimless glasses. And no dirty books. I looked at them all."

"He was carrying books?"

"Sure. Six of them. Not the ones we want, though."

"You sure you looked at them all?" I felt uneasy suddenly.

Pete was hurt. "Hell, yes, Hal. One at a time."

"Just the covers?"

Pete stared at me. "What else? I wasn't told to read them all the way through, for God's sake?"

I discovered I was having trouble breathing. I said, "What color was this guy's hair?"

"Brown."

"And no glasses? Think about it, Pete."

"No glasses." Pete was positive. Then he gave me a startled

look. "He blinked a hell of a lot, though," he said slowly.

I sucked in a deep breath and let it out again. "How long ago did this guy go in?"

"Couple of minutes. You must have passed him as you came out."

"I didn't. But he's got to be Satchell, Pete. The nut we're after. Even if he's nutty, this guy isn't stupid. The librarians here know him, he comes in all the time. And he knows we're on to him for stealing books. So he takes off his cheaters and wears a brown wig to disguise himself. And he disguises his dirty books, too."

"How?"

"Easy. With dust jackets from other library books. Make sense?"

"Could be," said Pete. He shrugged, then waved both arms over his head.

"What's that for?"

"Signal. It'll bring the Lieutenant here on the run with Kwalik."

"Good," I said. I was thinking frantically, trying to push down my first impulse, which was to rush into the library and yell for everybody to get out of the building instantly, especially Ellen. Which would no doubt cause a first class panic. And we didn't want panic now.

What we wanted was Satchell and his armload of books. If



Pete's guy *was* Satchell, he'd been inside the library for less than two minutes. Had he seen me, perhaps, and ducked behind something as I went by him? I doubted it. He was probably already out of sight in the stacks of the main library when I came through it.

Because if he meant to deploy most of his six bombs in the main library, which seemed reasonable, he'd have gone directly there to start planting them. Especially if he meant to retreat through the Technology Department exit after his bombs were planted.

Now then, it would take a minute or two to arm each bomb before he left it on a shelf, wouldn't it? I hoped so. And Satchell would set the triggering mechanism far enough ahead so he'd have plenty of time to get

safely out of the library himself before the first bomb exploded. Say ten or fifteen minutes, altogether, before he finished the job.

I said to Pete, "Stay here until Randall and Kwalik arrive, will you? Then bring them into the main library stacks. I'll go ahead now and try to locate Satchell. And when you come into the main room, keep it quiet and calm. This guy is crazy enough to blow his whole batch of bombs at once if he sees we're after him. Okay?"

"Okay."

I went at a quick walking pace through Technology, then at a run down the corridor to the main library room. There I slowed and turned into the stacks. At the end of each long, narrow book-lined aisle, I paused just long enough to see whether or not there was a brown-wigged, blinking Dr. Satchell in it anywhere before I went on to inspect the next aisle. Luckily I'm pretty tall. I could see over the heads of most of the people browsing in the stacks who might be blocking out my view of my quarry.

At the fifth aisle, I found him.

VI

HE WAS ALONE in the aisle, standing perhaps twenty feet away with his back to me, his head bent over a book that was open in his

hand. I drew back a couple of aisles, out of his sight if he turned. I was just in time to flag down Randall, Pete and Kwalik as they came quietly into the stacks. I made shushing signs at them. Randall nodded and raised his eyebrows, asking silently if I'd located Satchell.

I didn't say anything until they were beside me, hidden from Satchell by several aisles of head-high bookshelves. Then I pointed and whispered, "Twenty feet up aisle number five. Setting the timing gimmick on one of his book-bombs. I didn't see the others."

That's all Lieutenant Randall needed. Even speaking in a whisper, his command voice came through. "Go to the other end of that aisle, Hal, around the other cross aisle. Block him there. We'll go in from this end. Kwalik, you go for the bombs. Pete and I will take care of Satchell. When we've got him safe, Kwalik, disarm the bomb he's placing in that aisle. Ready?"

"Wait!" I whispered urgently. "Suppose he's already planted other bombs on some of these other shelves? We've got to know, if and where, before we take him. Because he sure as hell won't tell us afterward."

"How loud do the damn things tick?" Randall growled, momentarily at a loss.

"Not loud enough for Kwalik to

find them quick among all these other books!"

Kwalik said, "How many books was the guy carrying?"

"Six," Pete said.

"That's it, then," said Randall, relieved. "Before we take Satchell, we locate and count the books he's still got with him. If he has five left, we know he's only planted the one so far. And Hal knows where that one is. All right? Let's go."

I walked to the far end of aisle one, where we'd been standing, found the cross-aisle, leading to aisle five, empty, and cautiously took my position just around the corner of aisle five in the cross-aisle. I peered through the gaps in the bookshelves between us and saw Satchell closing very carefully the cover of the book in his hand.

From where I was, I couldn't see what he'd done with his other books. He pushed the books on a middle shelf beside him tightly together, to make room for another book. Then he slid his armed bomb into the opening thus made, and turned away from me toward the other end of the aisle.

I risked a peek around my corner. Randall and his men were coming slowly down aisle five from the other end, Kwalik, the bomb expert, in the lead. Craning around my corner, I saw why Kwalik was leading instead of

Randall. On the floor by Satchell's feet was a little pile of books with bright covers. I counted them with my heart in my throat.

Five.

Satchell was beginning to stoop to pick them up when Kwalik reached him. The timing couldn't have been better. For Satchell, thinking Kwalik just another library patron browsing through the stacks, turned slightly sideways to allow Kwalik to pass him in the narrow aisle.

Kwalik didn't pass him. "Excuse me, sir," he said to Satchell in a polite, help-the-old-lady-across-the-street voice, "can't I help you with these?" He half knelt at Satchell's feet, and with a smooth, unhurried, sweeping movement of practiced hands, scooped up Satchell's five remaining book-bombs and backed quickly away on his knees, allowing Randall and Pete to pass him in the aisle and bracket a bewildered Satchell neatly between them.

By this time, I was approaching the huddle of figures from my end of the aisle. I saw the quick glint of metal and heard the clicks that told me Randall and Pete had each handcuffed himself to one of Satchell's wrists.

Poor Satchell couldn't go anywhere now without dragging two burly cops with him. Amazingly, Satchell still used the low tone of

voice which old library custom demands when he said to Lieutenant Randall, "What do you think you're doing, may I ask?"

I didn't hear what Randall answered, if anything. I was watching Kwalik, the bomb boy, with those chills running up and down my spine again.

Kwalik cleared a space on a handy shelf behind him and gently placed Satchell's five books on it, flat side down. Then, with his fingertips, he delicately lifted the cover of one of the books a fraction of an inch, held it there with one hand, got out a pencil flashlight with the other, and shone the light into the crack. He peered inside, his head tilted slightly. He looked as though he was ready to run. *I know I was.*

At length Kwalik nodded to Randall. "Okay," he said, "these'll wait. Where's the live one?"

I said, "Here it is, Sergeant." I bent over and put my ear to the book Satchell had slipped in among the others on that middle shelf. And by God, it *was* ticking! Up to that moment, I hadn't quite been able to believe that Satchell really intended to wipe out five buildings full of books and people.

Six buildings, if you counted his own house with me in it. But that ticking book made a true believer out of me. "Hurry up,

Sergeant!" I said to Kwalik, and backed off like a timid school girl to the end of the aisle. Have I mentioned that I'm scared of explosives?

Kwalik had nerves of ice, apparently. He removed the ticking book from the shelf, opened its cover, and disengaged, with a touch like a jeweler's, a wire somewhere inside the hollowed-out book. "Got it," he said calmly. Then, to Pete, "You sure he only had six books when he came in?"

"I'm sure," Pete said. "I may be dumb but I can at least *count*!" He was disgusted with himself for letting Satchell get by him at the door.

Satchell himself hadn't said a word since his first weak protest to Randall. Probably because he couldn't believe his eyes when he saw me coming down the corridor toward him. He thought I was dead. His face paled and his reddish brown eyes, a nice match for his brown wig, now contained more desperation than they had yesterday—and more resignation, too.

Randall said, "Pick up your goddam dirty books, Kwalik, and let's get the hell out of here. I never have felt comfortable in a library!" He turned to me. "I don't suppose you know what kind of a car the professor here drives? So we can collect the rest of his dirty books?"

"Sorry, I never saw his car."

Surprisingly, Dr. Satchell spoke up then. He said meekly, "The rest of the bombs are in my blue Ford sedan, parked on the street behind the library." He gave Lieutenant Randall the license number. Randall jerked on his handcuff and growled, "Show us where."

I followed them out of the stacks, down the corridor to Technology, through Technology to the rear exit. It was a regular parade. Kwalik went first with his armload of deadly books. Then came Randall, Satchell and Pete, shoulder to shoulder like old buddies, handcuffs hidden under jacket cuffs. Then me, bringing up the rear, lagging as far behind those bombs in Kwalik's arms as I respectably could. Lau-

ra, on the Technology desk, scarcely lifted her head from her book as we went by.

I looked at my watch. Incredibly, from the moment I'd first realized that Satchell might be inside the library till now, when he and his bomb-books were leaving it under guard, only four and a half minutes had elapsed. They were four and a half of the longest minutes I could remember.

Yet I knew I'd gladly go through a dozen more like them—or a hundred—to keep Ellen Crosby in one piece. Even if she decided *not* to marry me.

Girls with faces like Botticelli angels and figures like Egyptian belly-dancers aren't all that easy to find these days. You know what I mean?

Next Month's Headliners:

YOU CAN BEAT A FRAME by BRETT HALLIDAY

The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

DEATH OF A DON by DAVID MAZROFF

Another TRUE CRIME STORY Masterpiece

THE PACKING CASE by JAMES HOLDING

a SHORT MYSTERY classic

TWO BIRDS

by EDWARD WELLEN

To kill the intruder seemed mere common sense. There was no way Tom and Kay could know that they were signing their own death warrants.

THE MARSHALL POTTERS' limousine pulled up noiselessly under the porte cochere of the Marshall Potters' mansion. The chauffeur got out and hurried around to open the passengers' door. Tom Overbury and Kay Potter stepped out. Kay gave the chauffeur a wearily bright smile.

"Thank you, Harold. Now you can go back to the embassy and wait for Mr. Potter."

The chauffeur touched a finger to his cap. "Very good, Mrs. Potter." He retook the wheel

and the limousine purred away into the night.

Tom drew his key ring out and isolated the front door key. They stepped up to the door. He paused with the key in the lock.

"Won't Marshall blow up when he finds we've left the reception without telling him?"

"Let him. Come to that, Tom, why didn't you raise that objection when I told you I had to get out of there immediately if not sooner?"

"Because you looked bored



enough to do something wild—and because I felt the same way. But it's sure to embarrass him."

"Handling embarrassments is his job. Chief of protocol." Kay passed a hand across her brow. "I didn't know I was marrying the State Department when I married him." Her smile was wan. "Though I must admit the first few receptions seemed fun. But after the first few hundred . . ."

"I can imagine."

"Don't let's just stand here, Tom." She stepped out of her shoes and picked them up. "That's better. Hurry with the door—I'm dying to get out of this gown."

"And I'm living for the moment you get out of it." His eyes were hot.

"That's what I like about you, Tom."

"The corny lines?"

"No; your light delivery of corny lines. You're an insincere hypocrite. It's refreshing. Ever since I married Marshall I've met only sincere hypocrites."

He smiled, opened the door, and they went in. They made for the right hand curve of the great staircase. Kay stopped and put her hand on Tom's arm to stop him. She kept her voice low.

"Did you hear something?"

He listened. "Uh-uh. It's just

the house shrinking at night. That, or a guilty conscience."

She leaned to listen, then straightened. "I guess you're right. Speaking of guilty consciences, let's wicked them up a bit, shall we?"

Kay swayed into Tom's arms and they kissed long and hard. Then, as one, they slowly climbed the stairs. They entered her bedroom. She switched on the lights, turned them down to the dimmest setting.

"Unzip me, darling."

He pulled the tab down to the small of her back. Suddenly he shivered. She felt the shiver and twisted to cock an eye at him.

"What's wrong?"

"An icy thought. He's hired me to help him write his memoirs—and here I am, helping write his obituary."

"You think too much."

"There can't be too much forethought if we hope to get away with getting *him* out of the way."

"Too much cleverness can boomerang. Tom, I still say the best bet is something clean and simple."

"I guess you're right. But what? A fall down the stairs? An overdose of sleeping pills? An accident while cleaning his gun? Simple ways, all of them. But there can still be a slipup

in any of them. So we have to give it a lot of thought."

Kay moved away from him. "If it worries you that much, maybe we should forget it—and each other."

He caught hold of her savagely. "Not each other. Come away with me."

"Darling, can you picture me giving up all this?" She gestured around them. "Even for you? No, Tom. He's asking for it with his refusal to give me a decent divorce settlement. And you can't keep me in this style, can you, darling? So?"

"All right, Kay. We'll find a way."

She snuggled against him. "That's my Tom!" All at once she stiffened. "Kiss me, Tom." Her voice had gone strange.

He frowned, then smiled and tightened his embrace. She brought her hot breath close to his left ear. What she whispered was not what he had expected.

"There's someone behind the drapes."

She twisted so he could look past her and see what she had seen. The tips of two thick soles peeped out from beneath the draw curtains. She glanced at the mirror. Whoever stood behind them could not see around the edge to where they were and the drapes were too heavy and well-lined to see through.

Kay whispered again. "Murmur endearments."

Under the cover of Tom's murmur she broke away from him carefully and her stockinginged feet took her to the dresser. She slid a drawer open. It was still there—the gun Marshall had left in the drawer when he moved from their bedroom into a bedroom of his own.

She returned softly to Tom's side and handed him the gun. After motioning him to wait a moment she reached out to the dimmer switch and raised the lights to full brightness. She stepped lightly to the pull cord, made sure Tom stood ready with the gun pointing at the hidden figure, then yanked hard.

A seedy-looking man stood there. He stared at the gun in Tom's hand and raised his hands, seemingly as much to push the sight from him as to surrender.

"Now, wait a minute, folks. You don't need that thing."

Tom tightened his grip on the gun. "Turn around."

The man turned slowly, faced the wall. Tom patted him down, found a gun on him, a small foreign-make Saturday night special, relieved him of it.

He weighed it and smiled. "You don't need this thing." He backed away. "All right, face around."

The man did so. He opened his mouth but Tom was gesturing with Marshall's gun.

"Sit in that chair. *Move!* That's it. Now put your hands in back."

Kay tied the man's hands behind him with a stocking and bound his ankles together with another stocking.

The man sat sweating. "Hold on. I can explain."

"Explain to the police." Tom's mind raced. He had already decided that the man would never explain to the police.

"No, listen—"

"Shut up! We don't have time to listen to you." A scenario was forming in Tom's mind and the man's whine distracted him. When the man opened his mouth again Tom stuffed another stocking in it and tied the gag in place with still another.

Kay was eyeing the stockings ruefully. He drew her aside.

"He heard."

She raised both eyebrows. "You mean about...?"

"Everything. If we set him free, or even hand him over to the police, we won't be able to go ahead with our plans. We can never be sure he won't either tip the cops off or try to blackmail us."

"But we have to do something, Tom."

"Only one thing to do." He

raised Marshall's gun. "We have to. We have a right to."

A light came into her eyes. "I see what you mean. In defense of the home. After all, *he* came armed."

Tom raised the intruder's gun. "That makes it all the better. Clean and simple. Two birds with one stone—or at least one situation." The light in his eyes matched hers. "Kill the burglar and Marshall both. The way it will look, Marshall surprised the burglar and fell in defense of home and beloved wife."

"Perfect!" Kay's eyes blazed. "Go ahead, shoot this one now!"

"Not so fast, Kay. It may be a few hours before Marshall gets back."

"So?"

"For one thing, if anyone hears the shootout, the shots ought to be in the same time-frame. Not one shot now and another two hours later. For another thing, both bodies ought to be just as warm. So we'll wait. This one will keep the way he is, nice and fresh for when Marshall comes home."

"You're right, darling. No slipups." Kay kissed him. "Couldn't be better if we had planned it this way."

They took turns watching the window and the man. It was Kay who sighted her husband's homecoming. They peered out

as the limousine delivered Marshall Potter and then was driven off to be put away.

Tom called from the head of the stairs as Marshall entered. "Hurry and see what we found hiding in Kay's bedroom."

Marshall frowned but said nothing. He marched sedately up the steps and strode urbanely into Kay's room. There was a very slight flush on his face.

"I am really put out about the two of you. Such outrageous behavior!" His head snapped back. "What's *this*?" He stared at the intruder.

Tom tried to keep his tone light. "Seems we trapped a burglar. Kay's jewels are in his pockets."

The intruder shook his head and hmmped mightily.

Marshall lost his diplomatic poker face. "*Burglar?*" He stared at the straining man. They could read the thoughts he drew and discarded. He was suspicious of the two of them, all right, and he didn't like the pair of guns in Tom's hands. "Just how long have you had him tied up like this?"

"Oh, about two hours. Wouldn't you say two hours, Kay?"

"Yes." There was a world of pentup excitement in her hiss.

"Two hours?" Marshall looked from one to the other.

"Why didn't you phone the police immediately?"

"We were waiting for you—weren't we, Kay?"

"Yes."

"That seems hardly necessary. But all right, now that I'm here, *I'll* call headquarters. No doubt they will handle it more discreetly and expeditiously if I'm the one making the call." He moved to the phone.

He never reached it. The intruder's gun drilled him between the eyes.

Tom turned to the intruder, who writhed and shrank in his bonds. Then he bulged. He might have torn himself loose if Marshall's gun hadn't drilled him through the heart.

Kay stuffed her jewelry and loose cash into the intruder's pockets while Tom untied the corpse and matched guns to hands.

Harold had heard the shots. They heard him call cautiously from the foot of the stairs. "Is anything wrong up there?"

Kay ran out to the railing and leaned over it, sobbing. "Oh, Harold, please phone the police. Mr. Potter shot a man he caught robbing us but the man shot him."

"THAT SURE LOOKS like just what happened, all right." The detective from Homicide had studied Peter Falk. He eyed the

intruder's corpse disapprovingly. "Yeah, I knew him. Shady character. But just as dead as Mr. Potter here." He poked at the jewelry and cash he had found in the man's pockets. He looked up suddenly at Kay and Tom.

"You know, I have this funny kinda feeling. I feel he's gonna turn out to be a strange kinda thief. I think we're gonna find he put something as well as took."

He matched the loose key he had found on the dead intruder's person against one on Marshall Potter's key ring. "This the key to the front door of this house?" He shrugged when he got no answer from Tom or Kay. "Well, I guess it's hard to tell just by looking at a key. But I'm pretty sure it is. Of course, I could be wrong."

He handed the key to his partner, a young man named Simms, and asked him if he minded trying it on the front door to make sure.

Kay and Tom dared not glance at each other, dared not appear to avoid glancing at each other, while the detective in charge filled in the wait by wandering around the room looking, it seemed to them, almost idly for something he expected to find.

Simms came back. The detective in charge paused and

looked at him. Simms nodded and handed the key back. The detective took the confirmation and the key almost indifferently. He pocketed the key and took up his seemingly idle hunt.

Suddenly he stopped. He knelt beside the baseboard. He took out an old pocket knife and pried loose a wire that the molding had hidden. "Simms, will you go look for what's at the other end of this?"

He stood up and, snakelike, held Tom and Kay with his eyes till Simms returned. Simms carried a small case. At a nod from the older detective, he plugged it in.

There was a screech of rewinding, then Kay and Tom suddenly heard their own voices.

"Unzip me, darling."

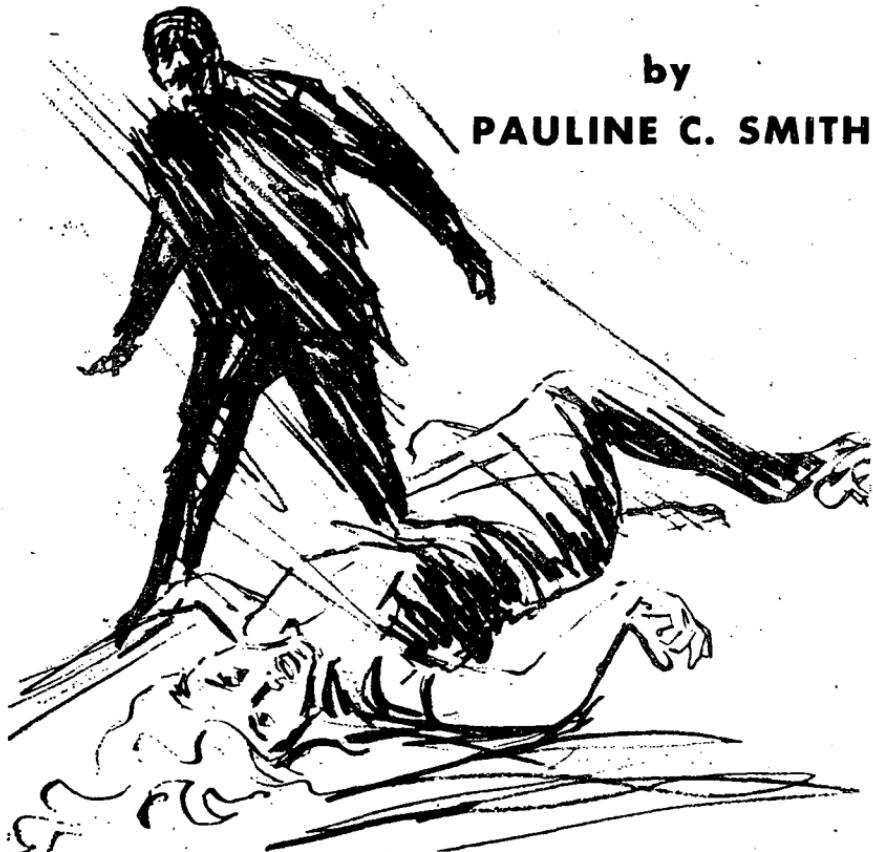
"What's wrong?"

"An icy thought. He's hired me to help him write his memoirs—and here I am helping write his obituary."

"You think too much."

The playback went on, bringing in the pleading voice of the intruder and finally the offhand voice of the older detective.

The detective switched the tape recorder off and spoke live. "Poor old Cunningham. Only good for divorce cases." Then he winked. "Still, he solved his own murder, didn't he?"



by
PAULINE C. SMITH

THE THIRD THURSDAY

Stafford was a man of fixed habits—so it was difficult for him to adopt a new way of life.

WILLIAM STAFFORD arrived home that third Thursday night of June only a little later than had been his arrival time the preceding third Thursday of

May or the one before that in April. William ran a small stationery and office supply shop and every third Thursday of the month he stayed at the

shop to balance his books.

He brushed Dagmar's cheek with his lips that morning and reminded her of the fact that this was the third Thursday of the month, therefore he would be late. Dagmar, his wife, was a short, rather squat woman with dark hair and high eyebrows, a fact which rather surprised him each time he called her by her given name since he thought of the name Dagmar (as most people probably do) as belonging to a tall Junoesque female—blonde, calm and powerful—a woman to respect. Not that Dagmar was not powerful—she *was*, and calm—and William respected her in a way that he had respected his late mother, out of fear.

Like his mother before her, Dagmar was a scrupulously impeccable housekeeper and a remarkable if unimaginative cook who served his food with neat and formal punctuality. She was so soft voiced he had to bend forward and pay close attention to hear her, and, although she smiled fairly often, she never laughed aloud, considering such an impetuous articulation to be unladylike. Also, perhaps, she had nothing to laugh at. William was no wit.

Dagmar wore her hair in a coronet which made her appear taller than she actually was

and gave her a regality she might not have otherwise displayed. She wore long flowing dresses that called forth in the male viewer an attitude of deference rather than carnal desire. Dagmar was a Good Woman and a bore. Not that William thought of her as a bore. He thought of her as a paragon of virtuous gentility, even as his mother before her.

On that third Thursday night in June, William arrived home at ten minutes after eleven, and Dagmar remarked upon it. "You are a little late tonight, William," she said in her softly genteel voice.

"Yes, my dear," he answered, brushing her cheek with his lips.

"Did you have trouble tonight?"

He jumped.

"With the books?"

His answer was passively noncommittal, offering no information even to himself. He switched on the television set to the nightly national newscast.

As Dagmar rolled up her knitting, she offered her customary instructions as to turning off the lights and seeing to the doors before she walked with stately tread up the stairs.

William sat in front of the TV set without seeing a thing. Vietnamese refugees trudged across the screen, babies were

lifted from mercy planes into adoptive arms, a former movie star died. All William saw was a parking lot, empty and dark, without knowing why he saw it. He didn't realize the newscast was over until he heard the rhythmic introduction, "*Heeere's Johnee!*" Then he turned the set off and did a surprising thing.

He walked to the sideboard in the dining room, opened the bow-fronted door, drew forth a bottle of bourbon and poured himself a double shot. The bourbon rocked his nervous stomach, which he clutched over curved rib cage, looking with astonishment at the uncapped whiskey bottle on the sideboard and the empty glass in his hand. He capped the bottle and put it away. He went to the kitchen and washed the glass. He checked the back door, walked through the house, turning off lights as he went, checked the front door and mounted the stairs.

A night light burned softly in the bedroom, dimly pointing up the plump and short bulge of blanket that was Dagmar in her bed. He felt a surprising spasm of hatred as he glared at the humped shadow, followed by an apologetic quiver of guilt. The room was filled with the sound of her heavy breathing, a nostalgic reminder to William,

for so his mother had snored before her.

He took off his suit coat and, leaning over, stretched the lapels between his hands under the night light, examining the fabric attentively, not knowing what it was he looked for with nervous dread that had about it an edge of left-over excitement. The coat appeared to be as usual, spotless and well pressed. He hung it on the back of the chair and pulled his tie from its narrow knot, checked it out under the light and draped it over the coat. He untied his shoelaces, pulled off his shoes, unbuckled his belt, unzipped his trousers, let them fall and stepped out of them. These, too, he inspected until satisfied. He folded them carefully, crease to crease, and laid them on the seat of the chair.

He turned off the night light and walked in darkness to the bathroom. Through the closed door, Dagmar's heavy breathing was still with him, but muted. He unbuttoned his shirt, took it off and held it up for examination in the bright glare of fluorescents. He opened the hamper and dropped the shirt with a palliative sigh of relief. He was exhausted now, and attended to the rest of his undressing in a hurry so that he could lie down and sleep. He tossed his shorts, his socks in

the hamper, closed the lid, lifted his pajamas from the hook on the door and put them on. He wore both tops and bottoms.

He stared into the bathroom mirror, studying his face as closely as he had studied his clothing, assessing its attributes as if his were the face of a stranger . . . a sensitive face, he thought objectively, rather sad and somewhat weak, the face of a gentle horse with a thin, neat mane. Feeling neither revived nor ravaged by his analyzation—feeling nothing at all—he plucked his toothbrush from the holder and ran a ribbon of toothpaste over the bristles. He lifted the toothbrush, curled back his lips, shook his head in dismay and stood frozen in his image . . . migod, he thought in anguish, remembering a painting he had once seen of a stallion on rampage, square yellow teeth gleaming, fetlock wild, eyes violent as his while he looked in upon himself.

He rinsed the toothpaste off his brush, rammed it in the holder and, trembling, hurried from the bathroom to his bed. He spent a restless night, but the next morning other than his eyes being somewhat grainy with lack of sleep and his stomach querulous from the unaccustomed jolt of liquor,

William felt his usual self. No unlabelled fears, no left-over tremors of a soiled and tattered excitement.

"Good morning, my dear," he greeted Dagmar at the breakfast table, ate his usual egg and a strip of lean and ruffled bacon, extracted his keys from his pocket, brushed her cheek with his lips and walked from the house to his car.

He started the car, sitting quietly a placid minute for the engine to warm up, switched on the radio that was always tuned to a local news station and backed from his driveway to the sound of a dog food commercial.

He was halfway downtown when the newscaster announced the finding of the body of a young woman in a parking lot behind a building supply outlet in the industrial east section of town.

He jerked forward and snapped off the radio, his sudden movement jarring the steering wheel so that a car in the next lane blasted an angry reprimand. William's hands shook on the wheel, his teeth chattered this fine morning and the sweat of an unknown fear beaded his temples.

He tapped his horn ring in abject reply to the irate motorist, now far beyond reach of his apology.

His mind a blank, automatically occupied with the mechanics of driving, he arrived only by instinct at his destination. He parked behind his store in the slotted section marked *Reserved* and sat in a daze, wondering where he was and how he had come to be here. He reached out to turn off the radio, realized it was already off, remembered in subliminal fog the shocking news account he had heard, leaped from the car and sprinted for the back door of the shop.

He walked through the stockroom with its packaged and neatly stacked stationery, cased typewriters, boxed check protectors, on through the narrow corridor and turned slowly to face his office. He drew in his breath and clutched at the door jambs with tight fingers as he stared at the open ledgers, uncovered calculator, the scattering of pens and pencils, all busily untidy in the golden pool of the lamp, bright in pane-filtered morning light. He clung, sagging in the doorway like a man being crucified, as he regarded with sick eyes an obviously interrupted third Thursday of June.

He raised his head and turned it stiffly, instinctively searching out the sound that pounded through his catalepsy—a rap on the front

door, he recognized at last, activating the arms that held him up to jolt him from the doorway across the room. He braced himself against the desk, reached out and fumbled with the lamp switch. He clicked it off and, breathing hard, made his way from the room and closed the office door.

Clumsily, as if it were dark and he did not know his way around these daylight clear and very familiar surroundings, he stumbled into the showroom shop in front. He could see now, through the glassed front door, the lanky frame and worried face of his part-time college-student employee.

William wrestled with the lock and opened the door upon a freshet of embarrassed vocalization . . . the boy had not meant to pound so loudly, long or demandingly, but the door had always been unlocked before at this time of day, open to him and to customers. He had been concerned.

With a distracted wave of his hand, William discounted both the embarrassment and concern with the suggestion that the boy take care of business at the front while he worked in his office—at least through the morning.

WILLIAM OPENED his office door slowly and with hesitation in

the hope that the desk would be revealed in sterile order with the calculator covered, ledgers closed and in place, pens and pencils in a soldierly grooved row—not the chaos he had imagined when, in delusion, he had looked into the office a few minutes earlier.

He widened the door and his eyes were again assaulted by the disorder that might be expected at nine o'clock of a busy third Thursday evening, but not at nine o'clock of the following morning with the books balanced and a conscience clear. He leaped across the threshold, closed the door behind him and stood there, panting.

He tottered to his desk, clapped the cover on the calculator, slammed a ledger closed and wrung his hands in fearful indecision. The books still were not balanced, his third Thursday-of-the-month work as yet incomplete. He sank to the chair, tore off the calculator cover, opened up the ledger and the accounts on the ledger sheet swam before his eyes.

He dropped his head to his hands and remembered, in the dark of his palms, how he had taken a break the night before—at the fifteenth of the preceding month's accounts as always—just as usual, a mid-month break during the mid-accounting procedure, to roll

down his sleeves, slip into his jacket, slap his hip pocket to make sure his billfold was there, leave the desk lamp burning and feel his way through the narrow corridor of the stockroom and out the back door.

The parking lot had been empty except for the deeper shadow of his car, which he passed as he walked between two buildings and, on the next block, stopped in front of the China Cup, a clean, short-order restaurant he invariably visited each third Thursday of the month at precisely the same time, for a piece of Boston cream pie and a cup of rich black coffee, served to him by the clean hands of an unobtrusively ladylike waitress. Although there had been only a dim light in the empty restaurant and a sign in the window that told him it was *Closed for Remodeling*, he could not believe that such a disaster would befall him to upset his careful Thursday-of-the-month calendar.

He tried the door and it was locked.

Petulantly, he had then plunged between the buildings to enter his parking lot, started for the back door, halted, noting the light shining from his office window onto the brick wall and feeling the break of

the evening empty within him. Then he made a rash decision. He decided he would find another restaurant for his Boston cream pie and coffee. He leaped into his car and turned the ignition key, waiting only seconds for the engine to heat up before he zoomed onto the street.

William remembered the evening before in the dark closet of his palms, but he did not remember where he went or why he had not returned to the office to finish the closing of his books.

He took his hands from his face, threw back his head and shuddered.

Then he sighed and went to work, for the books must be balanced and the statements prepared. In minutes, the occupational therapy of fluid motion and a brain in the groove kept him serenely occupied. Automatically, he reached for and turned on his desk radio, tuned in to a local FM station that broke its round-the-clock music for only occasional skeletal news spots. The tranquilizing whisper of melody, accented by the faint click of his calculator keys, quickened William's fingers as always, and sharpened his accuracy.

So flew the hours with the shop in efficient attendance and, behind the closed office

door, the accounting task in its final days of the previous month, when the gentle rhythm of radio music was abruptly fractured by the sound of a voice relating the latest on the newest local crime.

"The body of the young woman found early this morning in a local parking lot has now been identified . . ." William dropped his pencil and his hand crumpled the corner of a ledger page as he held his breath and listened in unidentifiable terror. ". . . Pearl Matteschich, twenty-eight years old, who worked as a waitress at *George's*, a small restaurant on Third. It is assumed she was on her way home . . ."

William reached out and with a cold, stiff finger, switched the sound off.

Migod, migod!, he breathed, remembering now why he had left his cluttered office and why he had not returned.

He remembered *George's* as it beckoned in green flowing script through the dark, his reluctance to park the car and enter and his fascination, once inside, to find the place a grimy hole-in-the-wall and the waitress a slattern. He had looked up at the menu displayed in giant letters on the wall behind the counter—*Hamburger, cheese-on-rye, egg salad*—and smiled at the waitress.

"What'll you have?" she asked in a grating voice, her mind on other matters. He looked again at the outsized menu—*Pie: Apple, peach, custard.*

"You don't have Boston cream?" he asked. She shook her head.

Glancing at her hands, unhappily gray and unwashed but cheerfully tipped with carmine, he decided upon coffee only.

As he had silently predicted, the coffee was muddy and the thick crockery cup rested in a brown-stained saucer. William drank it, revolted yet stimulated. He adjusted his eyeglasses so that he could more clearly observe the young woman behind the counter who leaned anxiously against it, watching the door.

Her brassy hair hung in lank strips to her shoulders. Her full lips, strangely lavender, pouted. Her untrammelled bosom under the slightly soiled uniform heaved in indignation as she announced to the world that she was damned if she would tolerate this missing of her bus every damn night. At that very moment, the door burst open and her relief, a girl with worried eyes, bounced hurriedly in with apologies for her lateness, drowned out by angry accusations from the waitress on duty.

"Another cup, please," ordered William as the new girl disappeared behind an inner door. Fretfully, the waitress snatched the cup from the saucer and flounced to the urn to refill it. William placed the money for the two cups of coffee, the last of which he did not touch, on the counter with a sizeable tip, and watched the rounded uniform disappear through the inner door just as the other, in a similar but less soiled uniform emerged.

He studied the giant menu once again without planning to reorder. Feeling a dreamy dissociation from the present, he gazed inattentively at the large printed words while his mind toyed with fantasies that curved his lips.

He did not take his eyes from the placard until the inner door opened and closed after his waitress—now in a dress that matched her nails and did not quite cover her hips—breezed by behind him, swung open the front door and yelled stridently over her shoulder, "Now I'll prob'ly have to wait a half hour for the bus."

William pushed back the full cup of coffee, turned on the stool and walked to the door. He failed to answer the, "Good-night, sir," from behind the counter as the door closed behind him. He could not see up

or down the street until he headed the car from the small parking space. Then, before he turned, he looked to the right and to the left, spotting the waitress in red under the street light on a bus stop bench at the corner.

He drew in his breath, tasted again the residue of bitter coffee, leaned over to crank open the passenger window, made a left and crept along the dimly lighted street. He stopped before the bench and called, "Do you want a lift, miss?" Her lavender lips were tightly prim and her eyes arched over and away. "You just waited on me, Miss. In there . . ." William reached out and opened the door invitingly. "Coffee. Remember?"

She turned her head and cast welcoming eyes upon him. The lavender lips parted.

"You said you'd have to wait awhile. I'd be glad to drop you." Before the words were decently uttered, she was in the car.

William could not remember precisely how it had happened. It must have been the voluptuously shady lady beside him who made the suggestion. Surely it could not have been he unless, with the repressed pile-up of years, his needs had burst forth in a font of emancipated articulation. However it had happened, he found himself

cruising the industrial east end in search of a bar which Pearl, the waitress, discovered with practically no trouble at all, calling raucously from the passenger seat and pointing through the passenger window, "*There's one.*"

He drank bourbon and water, the only drink with which he was even remotely acquainted, and sparingly since he rarely drank at all. Pearl's choice had been a sidecar, another and another, which was as far as William remembered—the bar, Pearl's grating voice, the lank strands of brassy hair that excitingly brushed his shoulder each time she tossed her head to give forth with a burst of explosive laughter.

After that, his mind turned protectively foggy and he swallowed the sickness that rose to his throat.

He reached for his pencil and turned blind eyes on the final ledger days of May when a gentle tap at the office door roused him from the night's elusive recall and the morning's pecking panic. The college boy helper reminded him, with apology, that this was one of his half days, but he would cut afternoon classes should Mr. Stafford require his services further in the showroom.

"Not at all," William assured him heartily, rising with alac-

ricy, to hurry around his desk, away from his still unfinished book work and the demon radio that hinted such dreadful things. He needed personal involvement on a vendor-to-customer level, impersonal communication as to the rag content of bond paper and office forms to be printed. He needed the bustle between showroom and stockroom.

He needed thought-quelling activity.

He shut up shop at six o'clock, his mind empty and easy at the close of the day. He straightened a few displays, emptied the cash register of checks, walked down the corridor to his office and, once again, the shockingly mindful sight of his disordered desk drew a quavering moan from between his lips.

He dropped to his chair, adjusted his eyeglasses, picked up a pencil and ran his finger down the page of a ledger, attempting to take up where he had left off, thinking that surely, once he struck the May balance, put the ledgers away, lined up his pens and pencils and capped the calculator, his life, too, would miraculously become neatly circumspect without any memory gaps holding a penned-up horror.

He worked for minutes before he noticed the failing daylight

through the window that faced a wall, and leaped from his chair with the realization that it was after closing time and he should be on his way home to Dagmar.

What was he thinking of—sitting here, puttering with books that should have been closed and put away? And how could he explain to Dagmar his remission of the third Thursday of the month, leaving the books, still unbalanced to this, the next evening? How could he explain it to himself?

He reached over to turn off the desk lamp, discovered it had never been on, left the desk in a clutter, raced through the stockroom and out the back door to the parking lot.

In his car, he once again became an automaton, turned on the ignition, warmed the motor engine, flipped the radio switch, ignored the singing commercial as he eased out into traffic, heard the bong that announced the 6:30 time, accelerated within the bounds of safety and unknowingly ran a stop light as the newscaster suddenly blared a follow-up on the "parking lot murder."

Panicked, William failed to hear the squeal of brakes and outraged horn blasts as he tore through the intersection to the sound of the newscaster's announcement that the coroner's

office had now placed the murder of Pearl Matteschich as having occurred at a time somewhere between ten and midnight, when his frantically fumbling fingers connected and twisted the dial into silence.

He arrived home, trembling and perspiring, at ten minutes of seven—an unheard of hour—so confused he parked in the driveway instead of entering the garage.

He walked into the house, brushed his lips over Dagmar's cheek, answered her softly cultured reprimand as to his unaccustomed lateness with several vague excuses involving laggard customers and tangled traffic.

He sat down to the table and, while eating his uninspired dinner and listening to Dagmar's bland conversation, became so lulled into a sense of security that he was sure he had left Pearl in the bar the night before, that he remembered no further because there was nothing further to remember. It must have been that way.

He looked up brightly from his mental rationalization.

"Yes, my dear?" he asked Dagmar across the table, not having strained to hear her still small voice that had droned on in ladylike whisper.

THE EVENING PAPER lay folded on the arm of his chair while William searched the television dial for a program to catch his interest. He did not turn the set off or unfold the paper until Dagmar had rolled up her knitting, and rising gently reminding him to turn off the lights and check the doors as she waddled with dignity up the stairs to bed.

Then he turned off the television and opened the paper to learn that the victim of last night's brutal murder had been sexually assaulted before strangulation. The paper fell from nerveless fingers to William's lap as he realized at last what it was he had searched for while inspecting his clothing so carefully the night before and why he had not found it.

He knew now that he was the killer. He had known all along, even though his mind sought to conceal the truth. He pulled himself up from the chair, letting the paper drop to the floor. He stumbled to the sideboard and drew forth the bourbon. He didn't bother with a glass, tipped the bottle and let the liquor gurgle down his throat as he remembered the bar and the revolting female companion to whom he was drawn by some strange, compelling force—a woman so different from Dagmar and his mother before her.

He remembered, too, his question, asked with a man-of-the-world air, as they emerged from the bar. "How would you like to take a drive? The fresh air would do us good. Ha, ha . . ."—the "ha,ha," offering a light touch, a bit of sophisticated badinage. "You don't want to go home yet! The night is still young," which added a delicate implication, nicely handled, he thought.

"Oh, God!" groaned William with recall vivid. "Oh, God! Oh, God!"

He tottered back to his chair, leaned over and retrieved the paper to read all about the case, carefully and thoroughly. As he read he remembered, hazily, the promised drive along city streets and between city structures into the poorly lighted warehouse section east of town. He remembered the parking lot at the rear of a building supply outlet he had never before seen, and the quiet and the dark once the motor had been turned off and the headlights were out.

He remembered his feeling of freedom, his emancipated joy while he fumbled in the shadows, his liberated glee as he disobeyed the rules of his childhood and defied the regulations of his maturity. Then he thought of Dagmar and his mother before her, and his fin-

gers found the throat of this harlot who had driven him to disobedience and defiance, and he pressed with guilt and in atonement.

He remembered the brassy hair, the soiled crimson-tipped fingers, the blast of her voice and the vulgarity of her manner and, even as he read of the empty narrowness of her existence—a woman alone, new in town with very few friends—he did not feel sorrow for her death, only guilt that he had done the killing.

The guilt walked with him up the stairs to the bedroom and sought to smother him as he gazed, in the faint glow of the night light, at the thunderous mound of blanket that was Dagmar. The rumble of her breathing filled the room, capriciously interrupted by shrill exhalations, reminding him with a shudder, of last night's fitful gasps that throbbed under his fingers through the dark of his car.

With the burden of guilt sloping his shoulders, he walked around the beds to look down upon Dagmar and felt an agony of hatred tremble his hands. He turned away without knowing that the guilt was his own vindication, or which one of the women he hated.

WILLIAM DID NOT finish balanc-

ing the books until the first Tuesday of July. By then, the parking lot murder had moved from the front page to an inner section of the paper and the local radio newscaster failed to include the case in his reporting. Known sex offenders had been rounded up, questioned and released, the police had nothing further to go on.

William's life, after that one highlight, settled into its accustomed routine. He brushed a kiss on Dagmar's cheek each morning upon leaving for the shop and brushed another with his return.

With the passage of days, his memory of that third Thursday night in June dimmed except for an occasional bright flash of recall. His sense of guilt, however, remained at fever pitch. He wanted to confess and thought of doing so each evening as Dagmar sat with her knitting, the needles flashing hypnotically while her genteel voice droned of unimportant matters.

He thought of crouching on the footstool at her feet, as he had once done with his mother, of pouring out his confession as he used to confess his boyhood sins, of abasing himself and begging for mercy with Dagmar's benevolent hand on his abject head, just as it had been with his mother.

He thought such thoughts every evening.

During the day, when a customer lull occurred, he found himself thinking just as graphically of phoning the police to declare dramatically, yet with great calm, "I am guilty. Come and get me."

He thought of an anonymous telephone call or an unsigned letter to the police—a way to assuage his guilt yet keep him free—and worried then as to the availability of voiceprints over the phone, just as he worried over the traceability of his handwriting or typewriter used in a letter.

William's guilt became his staff of life, his obsessive interest, laid aside only to wait upon customers or suggest a new display to his college boy part-time assistant. In the evenings, his entire preoccupation was with his guilt as he listened to but did not hear the boringly decorous speech of his wife while he built garish castles in the air of confession, both direct and oblique.

William wore his guilt like a badge of merit on a chain around his neck, carefully hidden under his starched collar and the narrow knotted tie. He took it out only for his own inspection and to dwell upon various means of absolution and atonement.

On the third Thursday of July, at nine o'clock break-time when he had reached the mid-June accounts, he made his decision. He rose from his desk, unrolled his shirt sleeves, put on his jacket, slapped his hip pocket to make sure his billfold with its proper identification was there, switched off the desk lamp and felt his way from the dark office down the corridor of the stockroom and out into the soft summer night.

He warmed the the motor of his car, switched on the radio, turned the dial to music, lowered the tone and eased from his parking lot to the street. He knew only the approximate location of the police department and so had to search. He didn't mind, the evening was fine and traffic was light.

When he found it, on the edge of the industrial east end, he realized he had passed the building before without notice. It was dimly lighted. Three or four patrol cars were parked in a parking lot at the left of the building, about the same number of privately owned cars were parked in the lot at the

right. William parked on the street.

He braked, switched off the lights, let his motor idle and listened to the quiet tones of radio music as he rehearsed what he was to say. *I wish to report a crime*, he began, then shook his head and started over. *I wish to report that I am the perpetrator of a crime committed* . . . He thought again of that night a month ago, of the parking lot, the drive, the bar, the woman and the restaurant . . .

Drawing in his breath, he jerked forward to snap on the lights. He released the brake, shifted to drive, made an illegal U-turn in front of the police station and drove east with pounding heart, to find a hole-in-the-wall restaurant, a woman, a bar and a parking lot.

He cruised slowly, scanning the bus stop benches as he passed, and, leaning over, he rolled down the passenger-side window.

He would know the woman when he found her.

He tapped the tight knot of his tie with satisfaction.

MIKE SHAYNE PRESENTS — Next Month's New Novel

YOU CAN BEAT A FRAME by BRETT HALLIDAY

The Best-Laid Plan

Main was a real big-time swindler. Alas, to make a getaway, he was forced to deal with a pair of small-timers.

by
BASIL WELLS

MAIN HAD MADE his ungraceful, drunken exit from the *Blue Boar*'s filthy barroom a good ten minutes back. He crouched now in the shelter of a leafy clump of sumac and maple saplings at the further edge of the unevenly graveled parking lot, his eyes on the unlocked door of his shiny year-old sedan.

He had left his keys in the ignition, and his wallet, with all of his identification as Allen Main, treasurer and vice-president of Potterville Plastics, wedged in the edge of the driver's seat. Reluctantly he had



left a fifty and three tens in the black leather's doubled embrace. It might lend a touch of needed authenticity if all went as planned.

Main swore. He had chosen the *Blue Boar*, on this narrow blacktop road a mile outside Polder City's limits, because of its reputation for catering to

punks, dope peddlers and underworld characters in all the lesser categories. Surely a late-model car, with keys in the ignition and a suitcase and several other packages in the back seat, would attract the notice of some car thief.

It had to be tonight. By tomorrow morning his embezzlement of the company funds would be exposed. His wife, and her two brothers, the major stockholders in Potterville Plastics, would show him no mercy should he be arrested. He had to die tonight before his disappearance, and the letter mailed to his wife, warning that he would never be taken alive, triggered an intensive search for him.

His breath caught briefly in his throat. A bulky furtive figure was drifting about the parking lot among the twenty-plus cars parked there. The two pole lights were ill-placed, their greenish light, shadowy and thin, conquered by the fog that flooded about, and over, the silent vehicles and the woodlot surrounding.

He finally reached the greenish sedan that belonged to Main. The door came open. Could be he was only after portable loot. But those car keys were so convenient. Main had counted on that. Transportation and parts to be

stripped—or the whole car sold to some dealer at a tenth of its worth.

The thief *had* to start up the engine and drive out of the lot. If he did not do so all the months of careful planning and the forging of new identities had been wasted. He would never get to spend the eighty-two thousand dollars he had salvaged when he realized that the game was up at last.

Start it up, he urged the unknown criminal silently. Drive out of the lot, fast. Six minutes and then the ten sticks will blow. No traces.

His palms were sweating. This was the crucial moment that would either spell freedom and relative affluence, or prison. He felt no concern for the man he was baiting to certain death. A petty, worthless crook, wasn't he?

The furtive man was inside. The door closed and the dome light went off. The starter burbled life into the motor, and Main took in a deep shuddering breath of relief.

"Be parked on the road opposite the tavern by eleven tonight," he had told Nareen Rodda, the well-endowed, pale-haired woman who was to share his enforced retirement. "Don't leave before one o'clock for any reason."

Nareen had pouted, scowled,

but nodded agreement. She had suggested that she go on ahead to Mexico, by air, carrying the money. Main had laughed at this clumsy attempt to out-smart him. In the three months they had been together he had come to understand her greedy, amoral character very well. As long as he had something she desired, she was available.

"We'll pick up the money," he had informed her, "and then start driving. No airplanes or buses. Just McLane Streeter and wife, tourists."

"I hope we get there before Teddy gets out of the slammer," the woman said. "He'd use that knife to make hamburger out of me if he found out about us. You, too."

"No chance, Nareen," Main had assured her. "You said he had another two years. By then there'll be no chance of tracing you."

The pale big eyes had narrowed as she shook her head.

"Take nothing for sure, Al. Some judge or a bunch of do-gooders could spring him tomorrow. Or maybe, yesterday."

Main had laughed at her, and had gone over their plans for Friday night again. And again. Nareen was slow to learn.

He had been preparing for this contingency as long as two years ago, skimming off only a few thousands at first. When he

had enough he planned to tell off Edna and her two brothers. But investments had gone wrong, and he was forced to dip more deeply. Then came the inspiration to forge a new identity and leave with a small fortune in company assets.

"I don't see how leaving your car and identification at the tavern," Nareen complained, "is going to do any good. They'll still be looking for you and the money, Al."

"So just let me worry about that," he had told her.

After the car and its driver were reduced to near-atoms, she would understand. And she would keep her mouth shut. Nareen knew all about accessory and all the other legal, and not-so-legal, terms familiar to the criminal elements of Polder City. She had grown up there on Thyssen Street and been married to Theodore Rodda for three years before he took a fall for manslaughter.

"We run through it once again," he had insisted . . .

NOW, AS HE WATCHED the lights of his car come on and the shiny vehicle push through the low hanging fog, Main smacked his left fist into his right palm exultantly. He laughed. Then he started off through the foggy woodlot, downhill, toward the overgrown

narrow road that angled away from the main highway at this point.

Four minutes' walk should get him there. The aging brown station wagon, with Nareen at the wheel, would be waiting. A moment or so later, the un-checked timing device, released by the starting of the car's motor, should touch off the bomb.

Even if the wallet was not found—and he doubted that it could weather such a terrific blast—several of the patrons of the *Blue Boar* had recognized his face. He had counted on that—their identification and his letter warning about not being taken alive should remove all doubts as to his death.

Trees and briars and a scattering of rocks—he fell twice and suffered a bruised kneecap and a skinned nose. Then a weedy ditch and the narrow lane. The station wagon was waiting. Nareen pushed open the right hand door. He climbed inside.

"Let's go," he ordered.

At any moment now the blast would come. In a matter of five minutes the thief could have gone several miles. Even so, he would hear it. He wanted to be in motion when it came.

The motor had not started. He turned to Nareen. She

was a dark bulk in the weak moonlight that overrode the fog surrounding the car. He snapped on the light. She was grinning at him. Her eyes were cold and defiant and knowing. He felt a chill tightening of his shoulder muscles and chest.

"Let's get going," he said.

Something sharp and hard jabbed the nape of his neck. He made no attempt to turn his head as suspicion grew to certainty. Nareen's Ted—he had never been in prison or had recently been released. They had been playing him along—using him—baiting him, even as he had baited the car thief.

"Now let's talk." The man's voice was slow and toneless. "Where's the loot stashed, Main?"

"Forget it." His voice quavered in denial of the brave words. "You'll never find out from me."

The knife jabbed. He felt blood leak down inside the neck of his open blue shirt.

"Out of the car, wise guy." The knife jabbed again. "Into the trees over there. You'll talk, Main."

The woman's lip curled and she laughed at him. Main moved woodenly to slide out of the seat to the edge of the road. The lanky tall man with the knife moved close behind him.

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SEPT—316



HIGHWAY HIT-MAN

by EDWIN P. HICKS

Six drivers murdered on a single stretch of highway without a single clue—until a veteran ex-patrolman figured the motive.

THERE IT WAS in a streamer headline on page one of the *Times-Record*: **HIGHWAY KILLER STRIKES AGAIN!**

Big Joe Chaviski read the story and swore. Six murders on the 20-mile stretch between Fort Sanders and Sallisaw, Oklahoma, within the last 90 days! In each instance the vic-

tim had been a male, although one young woman had been hurt in one of the attacks, her companion having been killed. In each instance the body had been found in the wreckage of the car, and in each the driver had been shot in the head by a shotgun.

The latest victim was 19-

year-old Fred Barlow, a Salливaw youth employed at a Fort Sanders supermarket. The car had gone off the right side of U.S. Highway 64, and the left side of his head had received a charge of No. 4 birdshot fired at close range.

Joe Chaviski swore out loud. These killings weren't any of his business, he tried to tell himself, because he was now retired from the police force. He was no longer chief detective. Even if he were still on the force, the murders were outside his jurisdiction. They had all taken place over in Oklahoma, and Fort Sanders was in Arkansas.

He ate his evening meal of hot tamales and topped them off with a generous serving of vanilla ice cream. Such a combination would give him the devil later on, but he wanted hot tamales, and he always ate vanilla ice cream for dessert.

He wondered how the white bass were running on the Arkansas this week, decided he would rather head for Lake Owachita and try for black bass this time of year. The lake ought to be about the right level by now. But it was a long way down there.

The phone rang.

"Captain Rogers, Oklahoma State Police."

"Why so dang formal?"

"You going to be there for a few minutes, Chaviski? I need to talk to you."

"Sure will be, Pete. Come on out."

Chaviski's eyes sparkled. Thoughts of fish went out of his mind. This was more like it. He had known Pete Rogers from way back when he was a rookie state patrolman. That had been a long time ago. Rogers had something on his mind, and he had a good idea what it was.

Five minutes later, Pete Rogers was knocking on the front door.

They shook hands warily. When two big lawmen like Joe Chaviski and Pete Rogers shake hands there is always the chance one of them will try to pulverize the other's hand with a sudden crushing pressure—for the hell of it, and for the fun of it. Chaviski liked Rogers, and Rogers liked Chaviski.

But there was no foolishness with Rogers now. Tall, wide-shouldered, powerful, he wasn't thinking of old times or playing games. There were worry lines across his forehead and a grim set to his jaw.

"Sit down and have a cup of coffee," said Chaviski. "Want some ice cream?"

"Just coffee, Joe."

The state trooper drank the

coffee gratefully, then blurted, "I need your help, Joe. We got to get this highway killer. I can get you a little money as a special investigator if you'll help. Me and my boys and the guys sent in from State Headquarters aren't getting anywhere."

"Last time this killer struck it was on Interstate Forty. The time before that it was back on U.S. Sixty-four. Victim always shot-gunned with Number-Four bird shot from close range. Leaves a hole big enough to stick your fist in or takes half a man's head off. There ain't no rhyme nor reason to these killings."

"We haven't got a prayer to go on so far. We got to put a full-time investigator on it from the Arkansas side of the line. It's as liable the killer is from this side of the line as on our side. You're the right man for it. Can you make it?"

"Starting right now," said Chaviski. "Tell me what the newsboys don't know about these killings."

"This last Harlow boy had been drinking," said Rogers. "Pretty wild youngster, but there wasn't nothing real bad about him. In fact, he was a nice kid. I stopped him a year ago myself when he was weaving a little on the road. But he wasn't drunk. Had like a couple of beers."

"I gave him a warning and followed him back to Sallisaw, just to be sure he watched what he was doing. That's the only time any of us ever stopped him. But he had been drinking whisky last night, and a fifth was broken in his car."

"What about this shotgun business?"

"Side of his head almost taken off. You know how it is when a guy gets shot at close range with a shotgun. You could kill a grizzly bear with birdshot at ten or fifteen feet. Tears a hole like a cannon ball."

"Then you figure somebody's coming up close in another car and shooting right through his open window?"

"Right! He comes up behind them and crowds them towards the outer edge of the highway and shoots them out of the right side of his car. Could be an open car, of course, or he could be poking the gun one-handed through the window space."

"Got anything you haven't told me yet?"

"No, Joe. This young girl, Elvina Wright, who was hurt when Harry Fincher got it two weeks ago, is still in City Regional Hospital. She was pretty much bunged up when the car went off the highway into the ditch and can't tell anything

about the kind of car the killer used.

"She's the only person who's lived through any of the attacks. All she knows is that a car came up from behind and crowded them. Then there was a roar and a flash from the other car. Fincher fell over against her, and the car went off the shoulder and turned over three times. Miracle she lived through it."

"Got a list of all those accidents and names of the people killed?"

Rogers nodded. "I brought you copies of all the reports we have on each case." He handed Chaviski an envelope. "Do what you can, Joe. We've got an idea the killer may live in Fort Sanders. We've turned over every pebble in Sequoyah county and come up with nothing—questioned about fifty people. Haven't got the slightest lead. The damn thing is a puzzler all around. No reason behind it as far as we have learned—no rhyme or reason.

"None of the people killed were police characters. Oh, maybe one or two of them have been run in for drunkenness or traffic violations, but they were all respectable fellows. No feuds or anything like that that would lead to killings. And there isn't any guy with a screw loose around Sallisaw

capable of doing a thing like this. No nuts that we're familiar with driving cars around at night."

Joe Chaviski's blue eyes widened for a moment. He looked out the window towards his boat and trailer. There went his fishing trip, but he didn't care. For thirty years he had been a police officer. Now, in retirement, he missed the action much more than he would admit. It was good to know that he was needed again in law enforcement. It was good that Captain Rogers had asked his help.

He stuck out his hand for the second time. "I'll get right on it. I'll keep in touch with you."

"Good! Root him out, Joe. We think he comes from over here, and I'm sure he'll keep right on killing until he's caught. This guy is bound to be a nut of some kind. He's got to be stopped. Here—"

He pressed a special investigator's badge into Chaviski's hand, said, "You're now employed by the Oklahoma State Police. You locate that killer, and you won't gripe about the money we'll pay you."

Evening visiting hours at the City Regional hospital were from seven to nine. At 7:05 Chaviski walked into the room of Elvina Wright on the third floor of the hospital. A woman

Chaviski took to be the girl's mother, was seated by the bed where she lay.

"Don't get up," Chaviski told the mother. "I'm Chaviski, working with the Oklahoma State Police. Just want to talk to Miss Wright for a moment, if she feels up to it. How are you, Miss Wright?"

Too large, dark eyes smiled at Chaviski. "I'm feeling much better, thank you. The doctor says I can go home tomorrow."

"Good!" said Chaviski. "I understand you can't describe the car of the man who killed your companion."

"No, sir. It was dark. The first thing I knew anything was wrong was when Harry swore under his breath and turned up the rear-view mirror. The lights of the car following us were on full bright and bothering him. Then the car came right up close on our left side, and Harry pulled off on the shoulder to keep him from hitting us. The next thing I knew there was a horrible roar, and we were turning over and over off the side of the road. When I woke up, I was here in the hospital. That's all I know."

Joe Chaviski nodded sympathetically. "Only one more thing, Elvina. What kind of a driver was Harry?"

She remained silent momentarily, and the older woman

spoke, "He was a wild young man. I was afraid for Elvina to go out with him. Any mother would have been. He had been in two wrecks before this."

"Oh, mother!" Elvina wailed. "Harry Fincher was a good boy. Those wrecks were the other people's fault. Harry told me all about them."

"He's gone now," said Chaviski. "What you say won't be repeated by me. From what I hear, he drove pretty fast at times. One handed driver, wasn't he?"

A blush rose to the cheek of the young girl.

"Tell him, Elvina."

"Sometimes," she said. "But I made him drive carefully. We never speeded when I was along."

"No," sniffed her mother, "I guess you didn't."

"Thank you, Miss Wright," Chaviski said, rising. "You've helped me a lot."

Early the next morning, Chaviski once more went over the reports of the highway murders, then got in his car and headed for Sallisaw. He remained there the rest of the day, interviewing relatives and friends of the victims of the killer. That night, at home, he compared notes, studying them intensely.

Two of the victims were young men, Fred Barlow and

Harry Fincher, each 19 years old. The oldest was Sam Waverly, who was 60 and one-armed. Bill Hendricks, Sallisaw rancher, was 42. Jim Bailey, a plumber living at Muldrow, Okla., between Sallisaw and Fort Sanders, was 35. Terry Mercer, painter from nearby Roland, Okla., was 55.

That night, Chaviski ate his evening meal downtown, but when he finished he could not have said what he had eaten. Nor had he remembered speaking to a half dozen friends or waving to as many more as he walked to his parked car. He got behind the wheel and drove across the river bridge into Oklahoma, studying the lights of the approaching cars. He turned around at Muldrow and drove back to town slowly.

There were no leads in this series of murders, no reason for the killings at all. The victims were not related—not in a single instance. It was peculiar, too, that while all six deaths had occurred between Sallisaw on the west and Fort Sanders to the east, none had taken place west of Sallisaw or east of Fort Smith. Definitely then, there was some connection between Fort Sanders and Sallisaw.

What was the connection? Many Oklahoma people worked in the Fort Sanders factories. Some came from Sallisaw, some

from Muldrow and Roland, some came from Spiro, Docola, and Poteau, on another highway southwest of Fort Sanders. All of the killings, the state police reports showed, had taken part in the early part of the night but well after dark—too late for people who worked on the day shifts in the factories to be returning home from work.

Turning it around the other way, not many people from Fort Sanders were employed in Sallisaw. But numerous residents of the city drove to Sallisaw on weekends for the drive and to eat lunch in one of the good Sallisaw restaurants. Sometimes local folks drove over to Sallisaw in the evening, enjoying the sunset on the way, and had dinner there, driving home leisurely after dark. It was a beautiful drive and, if it were a moonlight night, an enchanting one.

Joe Chaviski checked with his calendar. There had been a full moon when young Harry Fincher and Fred Barlow were killed. But the moon had not been full when the other four persons were killed. If each murder had taken place during a full moon, it might have been significant. Chaviski remembered the numerous old movies he had enjoyed, featuring a wolf man who did his killing

only in the light of a full moon.

Still, it seemed to him, the trail was getting hot—or maybe it was because he was concentrating so hard on the problem. It was difficult to catch the uncertain scent of the killer, but he had the feeling it would come to him strong and clear, given time.

Thinking was hard, thinking was tantalizing, but the old excitement of the trail was there. He was a police officer at work again on the kind of work he loved. He could feel the blood pounding hard in his temples from his effort to work out the puzzle, to put two and two together, or two plus two, plus X the unknown, and emerge with the answer.

Gradually the dim light began to brighten, then to glow, as Chaviski knew it would, same as it had in the old days when he had gone all out working mind and body on a case. He devoured all the vanilla ice cream in the refrigerator, then swore.

It was 11 o'clock at night, too late to get any more ice cream. Besides, it wasn't worth the effort to drive out to an all-night eating joint. But the old brain was functioning, and he was happy, happier than he had been in years! He was a hunter again, and his hunting instincts were at white heat.



Chaviski's questioning of the various relatives of the victims of the highway killer, in Salisaw, had revealed very little, if anything, when he considered the individual cases. But when you added up everything, one significant fact stood out—the driving habits of each of the victims at times were questionable. The remains of a fifth of whisky had been found in the wreckage of the car young Fred Barlow was driving.

There was reason to believe that Harry Fincher had been driving a bit carelessly—perhaps with an arm around Elvina Wright. When a young couple are smooching in a moving car, the car itself is likely to do some weaving on the highway. Bill Hendricks, the rancher, had been involved in two car accidents within the last 18 months, although he was a non-drinker. Friends of Hendricks had told Chaviski that Bill Hendricks was a fine man but unlucky in or out of cars. He had stepped off a Sal-

lisaw sidewalk one night and broken his leg. Barely recovered from this injury he had slipped on icy steps of his own house one January night and broken a wrist.

"He was accident prone, Jim was," a nieghbor told him, adding "Finest guy in the world, though—give you the shirt right off his back if you were in need."

Jim Bailey, the plumber, was also known to touch a bottle occasionally and had crashed his plumbing truck into the side of the I-40-Highway 54 overpass near Muldrow a couple of months back. Terry Mercer, house painter, had a record of minor traffic violations and was also know to hit the bottle regularly.

Finally, there was the one-armed driver, 60-year-old Sam Waverly. Waverly had lost his arm on the Anzio beachhead, and drew a good government pension. He was a responsible man but an atrocious driver. "He swung back and forth all over the road with that one arm of his. Lots of one-armed drivers handle a car as good as anybody else. But not Sam," a Sallisaw deputy sheriff informed Chaviski.

There you had it and Joe Chaviski began drawing his conclusions. There was substantial evidence that, at the time

each of the six murdered men were killed, their driving was faulty. He fried a batch of bacon and eggs, made coffee, and continued to think and eat. Thinking was a hard job—harder than digging ditches ten hours a day, Chaviski firmly believed.

He wished he was down at the Pine Valley camp on Lake Ouachita with nothing to do but fish and sleep and eat. He wished he was somewhere on the crappie run, pulling out giant slabs, or doing jig-and-eel casting off the lake points. It hurt to run your brain like a steam engine, pouring on the coal, or, like a gasoline motor, with the throttle wide open.

Yet, deep down, he was happy and proud and willing and eager. He was like a cold-nosed coon hound following a tricky trail—enjoying the hunt, yet eager and impatient to bawl *treed* at the base of a bottomland oak.

In high school, many years ago, Chaviski hadn't been too good in required algebra, but now he tried to reason things out via a made-up algebra formula: A (nighttime) plus B (weaving headlights), times X (the unknown) equalled D (six deaths). Well maybe he wasn't so good at algebra, but he did know if you were a driver of a car on a highway at night, and

you saw the weaving lights of a recklessly driven car approaching, you'd be ready to take to the shoulder.

But, after taking the shoulder and after the car had gone past, why would you turn your own machine and follow after the reckless or drunken driver, overtake him and blast him with a shotgun? All of the highway murder victims had been shot from the left side at close range. Therefore the killer had to be pursuing the victim, coming up from behind and on the left side.

Why would any driver do such a thing and do it six times over? Why?

Then his mental labor paid off. Of course! It had to be for revenge. The killer previously had been hurt by such a careless or drunken driver—or a loved one had been killed in this way, and he was avenging the death over and over again by shooting every bad driver he confronted on the highway.

It was the only valid solution.

Three of the deaths had occurred on a Friday night. One had been on Thursday, one on Wednesday, one on Tuesday.

His next step, obviously, was to check back on the Sequoyah County accident reports for the previous three, six or twelve months. Check for those accidents in which someone had

been killed on the stretch between Fort Sanders and Sallisaw.

Even so, what good would that do, unless there were witnesses or physical evidence of some sort, or he was able to narrow it down to one individual and keep a watch on him nightly, then catch him in the act of murder? And if he did catch him in the act, he would be offering up another human sacrifice. He couldn't *allow* it to happen this way.

There was only one way, as he saw it, and one way only that the killer could be caught red-handed and the menace removed from the 20-mile stretch of highways between the two cities. *He would have to be the decoy himself!* There was no time to lose. There was no telling when the highway hit-man would strike again.

By eight o'clock the next morning, Chaviski was driving over the free bridge into Oklahoma. Weldon Willis, about 60 years old, had operated a blacksmith shop near the end of the bridge in West Fort Sanders for the past quarter of a century. He didn't look at all like the typical blacksmith of the spreading chestnut tree fame. He was long and lean, with long, lean muscles to match his build, instead of the bulging kind.

Nevertheless he was a good smithy and had a good business repairing farming equipment, welding, now and then shoeing a horse. Mainly he was an expert metal man. Willis, because of his fine work and the location of his smithy was known to almost everybody in Eastern Oklahoma. And he knew them.

Joe Chaviski had work for him to do, and then he might possibly have heard something that would be helpful.

Willis knew nothing that was helpful in the case, it turned out. But he would have the work Chaviski gave him completed the day after tomorrow.

Two nights later Chaviski was on patrol again, on the highways between Fort Sanders and Sallisaw. He was on one of the 20-mile stretches shortly after sunset, and he was making a complete nuisance of himself, a menace to all traffic. He drove recklessly, he swerved in and out before oncoming cars. Once or twice he forced drivers onto the shoulder of the highway and drew screeching horn blasts and shouted curses.

He felt the hot blood rushing to his face. He was glad it was dark and the other drivers didn't know who he was. Reckless, drunken drivers were a pet peeve with him. He had run in "a million" of them in his career on the Fort Sanders

police force. He had always considered a drunken driver as loathsome as a mad dog.

Nevertheless, this night and each night of the following week, he was an obvious menace on the routes between the two border towns. He kept driving from sunset until midnight, back and forth, back and forth. He was going to have a hell of a gasoline bill to file with the Oklahoma State Police Department when this was over.

He had started the nightly patrol on a Friday night and gone through the week without incident other than the discomfort to the startled drivers of the other cars. The following Friday night he was rolling along midway between Sallisaw and Muldrow and forced a car coming toward him to take to the shoulder.

Suddenly, lights came on from a car parked on a side road, and there it came at high speed, right after Chaviski. Action! This was it! The fish had taken the bait. His great frame lowered as much as possible behind the wheel. Now he straightened out, his left wheels on the center line, and drove as steadily as an arrow in short flight.

The other machine came alongside, and Chaviski crouched even lower. The two

cars sped along side by side as if locked together. There was a flash of flame from the other car. Then the shotgun roared a second time.

Chaviski began edging over towards the other car. The killer driver stepped on the gas, but Chaviski stayed right with him, now moving well across the center line. The big black sedan was thundering along at full speed, trying to get around Joe. But Chaviski was an old hand at curbing another vehicle. There was a curve ahead. The killer car shot off the shoulder on the outside with brakes screaming, and overturned.

Joe Chaviski hit the radio. A few minutes later Captain Rogers of the State Police came roaring up.

"What you got?" said Rogers.

"Guy trapped under the wrecked car. The three of us ought to be able to lift it up and get him out."

The marshal's flashlight played over the face of the trapped man.

"Who is it?" said Rogers.

"Bill Blowinder," said the marshal. "Works over in Fort Sanders. He's a baker. He ain't been right since his wife was killed by a drunken driver only a quarter of a mile down the road. Happened a couple of

years back. Blowinder wasn't hurt, but he was changed after that. Friday was his night off."

"Come have a look," said Chaviski. He turned his flashlight on the side of his car. A steel shield had replaced the glass in his left front door window, and the shield was bent inward as if some giant had struck it twice with a sledge hammer.

"I didn't mind being a live decoy," said Chaviski, "when we've got a blacksmith around as good as Willis."

They called an ambulance by radio and, while they waited, Joe Chaviski explained to Rogers: "I figured out after a time that some guy was carrying on a personal crusade to rid the highway of drunken and reckless drivers. Every night this week I've driven like a drunken driver along this stretch of highway and on I-Forty too. I figured that was the only way."

Pete Rogers bent over the wreckage of the killer car and came up with a twenty-gauge, double-barreled shotgun."

"Light gun," said Rogers. I'd never thought of using armor like that. Where did you get the idea?"

"From the sign on the back of a tourist car the other day. It said 'Drive defensively. Get a tank!'"

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